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Emma Goes to the Arctic: An American Socialite's Trip on a Soviet Icebreaker, 1931

Alison Rowley

Why did Americans visit the Soviet Union in the 1930s? Behind this deceptively simple question lie a host of answers. Scores of published travel accounts have explored the attraction that the USSR held for downtrodden workers drawn by the promises of socialism at a time when their economic prospects in the United States seemed dismal.[1] Similarly, much attention has been given to the courting of disaffected intellectuals and cultural figures keen to examine what progress might look like in a different societal model, of African-Americans who were undoubtedly interested in what was presented as a more racially-just society, and of Jews wishing to have a homeland that they could call their own.[2] Historian Julia Mickenberg's work has explained the appeal of the USSR for young American women who were interested in what she terms "a new era of female possibility," where not only did they have expanded educational and career opportunities, but more equal partnerships in their personal lives.[3] Commonly left out of these narratives are the stories of mere adventure seekers – in other words, often wealthy Americans who had no desire to contemplate larger or deeper questions, but who were simply on the look out for their next thrill. Emma Burnham Dresser was one of them. By age and income level she simply did not resemble the vast

1. The most well-known of these accounts are undoubtedly John Scott's *Behind the Urals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); and John Littlepage (with Demaree Bess), *In Search of Soviet Gold* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1937). However, hundreds of other titles are listed in Harry Nerhood's annotated bibliography of English-language travel accounts; see Harry Nerhood, *To Russia and Return: An Annotated Bibliography of Travelers' English-Language Accounts of Russia from the Ninth Century to the Present* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968). For a scholarly assessment of economic migrants, see Tim Tzouliadis, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008).

2. See, for example: Joy Gleason Carew, *Blacks, Reds and Russians: Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008); Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2012); Meredith Roman, *Opposing Jim Crow: African Americans and the Soviet Indictment of U.S. Racism, 1928-1937* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012); Liudmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920-1940* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Robert Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

3. Julia L. Mickenberg, *American Girls in Red Russia: Chasing the Soviet Dream* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 5.

majority of women drawn to have a look at the Soviet experiment. Moreover, while Emma's story tells readers little of significance about US-Soviet relations at the macro level, it does underscore that she – like thousands of other Americans – were not deterred by the lack of formal diplomatic relations between these two countries. They felt free to visit the Soviet Union once the requisite infrastructure for tourists had been established. However inconsequential their stories may seem to some readers, adding the narratives of adventure tourists like Emma to the overall tapestry is important because, without them, our knowledge of American tourism to the Soviet Union remains incomplete.

This article begins by outlining as much of Emma's life as possible, given that she left no private papers for an inquisitive historian to consult. Using public documents and contemporary newspaper articles, it is still possible to trace the main events such as her marriage and divorce, as well as many of her social activities, but there are undoubtedly gaps in what can be said. Next the article considers how Emma likely heard about the trip that she took in 1931. The establishment of Intourist in 1929 is pivotal here and attention will be paid to the ways in which potential travelers, particularly those who lived in the New York City area as Emma did, were courted by this new player in the tourism market. The final pages of the article are devoted to the trip itself as well as to the press coverage that Emma received for her exploits while visiting the Soviet Arctic. Telling Emma's story recasts the narrative of the *Malygin'*s voyage from one that almost exclusively emphasized scientific experiments since it shifts the focus to adventure tourism instead.[4] Moreover, Emma's experiences also challenged prevailing gender norms – norms that assumed that, to quote scholar Jen Hill, "[e]xploring and mapping the Arctic was a self-conscious exercise in national masculine identity building."[5] Emma Burnham Dresser, who clearly lived life on her own terms, was not going to be put off by such notions. Instead, in 1931, this resolute woman boarded a Soviet icebreaker and set off for polar waters.

Who was Emma Burnham Dresser?

Emma Louise Burnham was born on 27 January 1869. She was the second of four children, and the only girl, born to Douglas W. & Hannah E. Burnham. The family was economically comfortable, with homes in wealthy enclaves in New York State. State census data from Emma's childhood shows that half a dozen servants lived with the family. On 20 November 1889, Emma married Daniel LeRoy Dresser at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Matteawan, NY with her fiancé's sister Natalie serving as the maid of honor. The couple's two children, Susan Fish and Daniel LeRoy Jr., were born in 1890 and 1894, respectively.

4. Noted explorer Ivan Papanin's account of the voyage is typical of Soviet sources which barely mention the presence of any tourists on the *Malygin*. See I.D. Papanin, *Led i plamen'* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1977). The same can be said for the article written by the expedition's leading scientist. See V.Iu. Vize, "The Voyage of the Icebreaker 'Malygin' to Zemlya Frantsa Iosifa in 1931," *Trudy Articheskogo instituta*, 6 (1933): 1-12.

5. Jen Hill, *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 3.

Despite her comfortable upbringing, marrying LeRoy Dresser was likely considered a social step-up for Emma. Dresser, who was born in Newport, Rhode Island in 1862, had a notable pedigree, which included connections to the wealthy and distinguished Fish and Stuyvesant families, who were prominent in New York and surrounding areas. His parents died when he was a child. The same year that he married Emma, Dresser graduated from Columbia University's School of Mines and went into business.

While LeRoy Dresser got down to moneymaking, other things were expected of women when they moved in Emma's social circles. Apart from being able to manage multiple homes with servants, and ensure that moving between these residences went smoothly, the wives of very rich men were judged on their social skills.[6] They needed to be gracious hostesses, lively conversationalists, and keen travelers. Their activities were noted in society columns on a regular basis. In the early years of her marriage, such notices show Emma attending dinner parties with her husband, traveling to Canada by private railway car when her brother Gordon chose to get married in Montreal, and christening a new yacht since she and LeRoy were keen members of the New York yachting community.[7] On occasion, Emma apparently even joined the crew when her husband raced his vessel at Oyster Bay's Seawanhaka Corinthian Yacht Club.[8] The club, on the eastern shore of Center Island opened in 1871, and two decades later boasted an elite membership that included Theodore Roosevelt and his cousin Emlen as well as other residents of what were known as the Gold Coast Estates.[9] One column in *The New York Times* informed readers that the Dressers were among the New Yorkers who had ventured to Bermuda to escape the winter weather in 1897.[10] Two years later, a notice in the society column of the *Newport Daily News* remarked that the Dressers had just "returned from a unique and remarkable trip to Idaho, where they shot big game and went through many experiences, such as do not often fall to the lot of men and women, particularly women."[11] Then, in 1902, letters held in the archives of the Theodore Roosevelt Center show Emma's husband corresponding with the President concerning possible hunting

6. Stephen Birmingham, *The Grandes Dames* (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2016), 234.
7. See, for example, untitled noticed in the *New York Tribune*, 10 January 1901, 9; and "Launch of the Syce," *The Sun* (New York), 5 May 1897, 4.
8. "Hope Won a Good Race," *The New York Times*, 31 May 1896, 3.
9. John E. Hammond, *Oyster Bay* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 123.
10. "Society", *The New York Times*, 14 March 1897, 10.
11. Untitled notice, *Newport Daily News*, 14 November 1899, 7.

trips in Mississippi and Tennessee, or near New Orleans.[12] These snippets of information reveal the Dressers to be a socially-engaged and adventurous couple whose activities, particularly concerning travel, were considered normal by 'The 400' and those on the fringes of this illustrious and extremely wealthy crowd, for journeys kept "one's conversational reserves well-stocked," and trips "to far-flung destinations…gave one something to talk about over cognacs, at intermissions, and in cigar-smoke-filled gentlemen's clubs."[13]

It should be noted that Emma never lost this love of exotic and adventurous travel, even after her marriage ended, which is apparent from the traces of her activities found in the press as well as the background information included in the newspapers articles that eventually discussed her trip on the Soviet icebreaker *Malygin*. In 1911, for instance, it was reported that Emma was keen to go up in a Curtiss biplane that was participating in Bar Harbor, Maine's "Aviation Week" exhibition.[14] In a later article, Emma was singled out because she "has sailed twice around the world and last winter [meaning in 1930] she flew over Asia Minor. While on a flying visit to Bagdad, the plane in which she was traveling encountered a severe sandstorm in the Arabian desert and was forced down."[15] In another column circulated by the Associated Press, readers were informed that Emma, who was described as "a world traveler and hunter," had previously hunted both moose in Canada and big-horn sheep in America's Rocky Mountains.[16] Unfortunately, any personal records that might provide further details about these trips have not been preserved.

LeRoy's Bankruptcy and Emma's Divorce

It is an understatement to say that LeRoy's financial failures had a drastic impact on Emma. After setting up a successful wholesale dry goods business, Dresser & Co., at the end of the 1890s, LeRoy continued to take on new business challenges. The biggest came in January 1902, when he became the founder director and president of the Trust Company of the Republic. Only a few months later, the bank got involved with the United States Shipbuilding Company

12. *Letter from Daniel LeRoy Dresser to Theodore Roosevelt*. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division. https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o38833. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University; *Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Daniel LeRoy Dresser*. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division. https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o183078. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University; and *Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Daniel LeRoy Dresser*. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division. https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o183058. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University.

13. Denise Kiernan, *The Last Castle: The Epic Story of Love, Loss, and American Royalty in the Nation's Largest Home* (New York: Atria, 2019), 81.

14. "Society at Bar Harbor," *The New York Times*, 6 September 1911, 9.

15. "Aged New York Woman Signs for Zeppelin Voyage," *The Brainerd Daily Dispatch* (Brainerd, MN), 15 May 1931, 1.

16. "U.S. Woman Back from Arctic Tour," *Evening Star* (Washington, DC), 24 August 1931, 16.

(USSC), which attempted to merge more than half a dozen large shipyards into one company. LeRoy, who was new to the field of bond underwriting and may not have fully understood all of the complexities of the financial dealings he was now involved in, authorized $4.75 million in funds to USSC, but apparently without verifying the financial statements of the companies involved.[17] When the USSC failed, it caused significant damage to the Trust Company and LeRoy's reputation. By early March 1903, Dresser & Co. also collapsed "with liabilities of $1,250,000, nominal assets of $750,000 and actual assets of $500,000."[18] LeRoy's bankruptcy was eventually discharged in March 1907, after he managed somehow to clear more than a million dollars worth of debt, but the scandal was front page news in American newspapers for months.[19]

Apart from the social stigma that the bankruptcy – particularly given its scale – brought, much of Emma's personal fortune was lost by her husband in his business dealings. When her father died in 1893, Emma inherited between $250,000 and $300,000, in other words enough money to live in a level of comfort that ordinary Americans could only dream of for the rest of her life. Now that financial security had crumbled, and Emma's marriage soon did as well. By 1906 the couple was living apart: Emma resided in Manhattan with the children, while LeRoy moved into rooms at the New York Yacht Club. Initially their troubles were kept secret, although Emma did file for separation via a Wall Street law firm. Rather than leave matters where they stood, however, LeRoy opted to answer by filing a notice concerning custody of their children; in other words, he suddenly wanted custody of the children he had walked out on months earlier and sought to prohibit Emma from taking them out of New York State.[20] This is the moment where the Dresser marital woes exploded into another full-fledged scandal. Emma's lawyer informed the press that LeRoy had abandoned his family on 1 September 1906, had not contributed a penny towards their support since then, and had dissipated his wife's financial assets in the years leading up to their split.[21] Emma herself chimed in with some comments for the media. "My husband wrecked my fortune and then deserted me", she said before adding, "He left me practically destitute, and when I asked for his support, he retorted that he would never give me another cent. He failed to provide for our children, leaving them to seek the shelter of my relatives…"[22]

In mid-January 1908, Emma quietly traveled to Sioux Falls, South Dakota to obtain a divorce from her husband. By the turn of the century, the divorce rate in the US had risen to one in twelve couples, but marital breakdowns, particularly when they involved affluent and socially prominent people, still garnered headlines in

17. Robert Hessen, *The Life of Charles M. Schwab* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990), 147 and 156.
18. "Suicide Follows Ruin," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 22 July 1915, 9
19. Ibid.
20. "Dresser Fight Aired," *The Washington Post*, 23 June 1907, 13.
21. "Suit to Hold Dresser Children," *New York Tribune*, 26 June 1907, 8.
22. "He Got Everything," *Leavenworth Post* (Kansas), 2 July 1907, 3.

the nation's newspapers.[23] Emma made this trip because divorce in her home state was only granted on grounds of adultery, which did not apply in this instance; in South Dakota, on the other hand, Emma was able to file on the basis of desertion.[24] Sioux Falls, by this time, had become something of a Mecca to wealthy women looking to rid themselves of their spouses, so it would not have been difficult for Emma to learn how to navigate this option. In 1893, South Dakota altered its laws so that anyone seeking a divorce had to live there for six months in order to establish residency. However, as historian April White notes in her study of the "Divorce Colony" (as the city was known at the time): "It had been the general understanding among Sioux Falls lawyers that an address at one of the state's hotels or boarding houses was enough to establish residency."[25]

Upon arrival, Emma checked into the Cataract Hotel and gave her name as Mrs. A.M.A. Stewart. However, she did not long remain at the hotel, preferring instead to move into "Wookiye Tipi" ("House of Peace"), a house purchased a few years earlier by Flora Bigelow Dodge when she too sought to divorce her husband and now a dwelling that Dodge lent to other socially prominent women looking to do the same. The house was situated in a quiet neighborhood on the outskirts of the city, and it offered the kind of accommodation that Emma was more used to, meaning a decent number of bedrooms, a bathroom and a kitchen with running water.[26] Emma passed the time in some rather surprising ways. She was said to mow her own lawn, for example.[27] In addition, newspapers after the divorce was granted positively revelled in informing their readers, that since LeRoy had spent her fortune in an effort to save his own financial affairs, Emma had been forced to sign up for typing and stenography courses in Sioux Falls in order to obtain some skills that could lead to a paying job.[28] While the narrative of the socialite fallen on hard times and victimized by her ex-husband dominated this vein of press coverage, the storyline also resembled the plot of many novels featuring the determined and sometimes plucky 'New Woman,' which were popular at the time. As scholar Martha Patterson puts it in her study of women in American fiction in the decades leading up to the start of the First World War: "Many New Women narratives emphasize how economic exigences forced their female protagonists to gain employment outside the home."[29] Perhaps this is how Emma, who must have had a hand in releasing the details of her studies to the media, wanted to cast her story and, although she was older than the New Women heroines, she certainly possessed many of their main characteristics, notably she was now "single, white,

23. Martha Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 6.

24. "Mrs. Leroy Dresser is Given Divorce," *The South Bend Tribune*, 11 August 1908, 2.

25. April White, *The Divorce Colony: How Women Revolutionized Marriage and Found Freedom on the American Frontier* (New York: Hachette Books, 2022), 18.

26. White, *The Divorce*, 190.

27. Kiernan, *The Last Castle*, 183.

28. See, for example, "Mrs. Dresser to Pound the Keys," *The Minneapolis Journal*, 23 August 1908, 17.

29. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 8.

affluent, politically and socially progressive, highly educated, and athletic."[30]

These speculations aside, what we do know is that Emma, who was represented at her hearing by South Dakota State Senator Alfred Kittredge, was granted her divorce on 11 August 1908. Word quickly spread across the country as newspaper after newspaper devoted attention to the matter. *The New York Times* even ran the story of the Dresser divorce on its front page.[31] Despite what she said at the time of her divorce, however, there is no evidence Emma ever took a job to support herself and her children. Instead, it appears that she lived off her remaining financial assets, including more than $200,000 raised via the sale of the family's vacation house on Center Island Point, Oyster Bay.[32] Emma did not have to share these monies with her ex-husband because, as she stated in an affidavit presented to the judge when she initially filed for separation from LeRoy, the home had been purchased with funds from her inheritance from her father.[33] Moreover, the 1910 US Federal Census lists Emma's occupation as "own income;" she, Susan and Daniel Jr. were then residing with Emma's mother in Manhattan, as they continued to do for a number of years.

Life After Divorce

After her divorce, Emma's actions are harder to track since newspapers stopped by and large reporting on them. Instead, her daughter Susan Fish Dresser moved into the society page spotlight. In December 1908, Susan officially "came out" as a debutante at a reception hosted by her maternal grandmother. The latter also threw a party for her at famed Delmonico's restaurant in New York a couple of months later.[34] These events were followed by a series of house parties at the Burnhams' country residence in Fishkill Landing, NY. Susan continued to be mentioned in society columns in the years leading up to the First World War: for instance, in 1915 she volunteered to sell refreshments at a benefit for the Lenox Hill Settlement, and participated in a café dansant given under the auspices of the New York Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.[35] A picture of a smartly-dressed Susan driving a motorcar was even used by newspapers when they reported on the death of her father.[36]

LeRoy Dresser had never fully recovered from the scandal that ruined his business affairs. In December 1914, he married Marcia Walther, whom one

30. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, 27.
31. "Mrs. Leroy Dresser Obtains a Divorce," *The New York Times*, 11 August 1908, 1.
32. "Will Keep Wolf From Door," *The Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1908, 12.
33. "Dresser Villa Sold," *New York Tribune*, 3 July 1908, 1.
34. On these events, see "Many Receptions for Debutantes," *The New York Times*, 13 December 1908, 13; and "Dance for Miss Dresser," *The New York Times*, 2 February 1909, 9.
35. Regular Circus at Sherry's," *The Sun* (New York), 14 January 1915, 9; and "Wears Odd Costume at 'Fantastique' Dance Given by Antisuffrage Women," *The Washington Post*, 22 April 1915, 4.
36. For example, see "Miss Susan Fish Dresser, Daughter of Daniel Leroy Dresser," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 13 July 1915, 16.

newspaper described as "a pianist well known in musical circles."[37] But the marriage did not relieve LeRoy's apparent despair at not being able to rehabilitate his finances and establish a home with his new wife. On 10 July 1915, at the Columbia University clubhouse of the Delta Psi fraternity, he shot himself. His body was discovered by the clubhouse steward and Dresser's lawyer, after the latter had received an alarming letter from LeRoy earlier in the day. When reporters reached out to Emma for comment, she spoke reasonably kindly about her former husband and his ongoing financial struggles. "He is dead. Really, there was nothing else left for him, I suppose", she was quoted as saying, before ending with these words: "I am glad that he killed himself with the first shot."[38] Emma attended LeRoy's funeral with her children.

While his older sister Susan was living the life of a debutante, Emma's son Daniel spent his teen years at boarding school. Notably, he attended Westminster School in Simsbury, CT in 1909-1910 and the Berkshire School in Sheffield, MA the following year. After finishing his education, Daniel eventually joined the American Expeditionary Force fighting in Europe during the First World War. He enlisted at the end of May 1917, and arrived in France as part of the 642d Aero Squadron in August 1917. The following year, his engagement to Betty Peale, a member of the Red Cross Ambulance Corps was announced, but it appears that the pair did not go through with the marriage.[39] Daniel suffered no injuries during his time in the military and he returned from overseas on 26 May 1919.

Emma also kept busy during the war years. She joined the Motor Squad of the National League for Woman's Service (NLWS). Within weeks of the United States entering the First World War, the NLWS had established not only its national headquarters in New York City, but a host of branches across the country. Tens of thousands of women volunteered for service, with the Motor Corps attracting more applications than any other division since, to quote historian and author Bessie R. James, it "appealed because of its originality, its daring and, as many imagined, its romance."[40] Given what we know about Emma Dresser, it is not surprising that she would gravitate to this branch of service. However, to be accepted, she had to meet certain criteria: notably, Emma needed to have two references, a certificate testifying to her health, and a driver's license. She must have lied about her age – she was 48 at the time – because the upper age limit for applicants was 45.[41] Members of the Motor Corps were required to keep their vehicles clean, and they were not only scheduled for regular shifts, but also had to be on call in case of emergencies. The only one of the latter that we know

37. "Brooklyn Girl Bride of D. Le Roy Dresser," *Brooklyn Times Union*, 5 March 1915, 16.

38. "Banker Ends His Life," *The Washington Post*, 11 July 1915, 1.

39. "Miss Peale Engaged," *Harrisburg Telegraph*, 21 October 1918, 4. Two years after the engagement was announced, Betty Peale continued to appear in brief society column notices under her maiden name. Daniel Dresser eventually married Olga Nairn in Arizona in 1938.

40. Bessie R. James, *For God, For Country, For Home: The National League for Woman's Service* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 55.

41. James, *For God*, 56.

Emma was involved in came in November 1917, when Emma was one of three members of the NLWS who helped to save an injured horse that caused a traffic jam on New York's Madison Avenue.[42] With that said, she must have continued to serve well into the following year because Emma was listed as "an aide" to Dr. Dorothy Smyley, the head of the Motor Corps, when the latter attended a parade which inaugurated a $100,000 fund raising campaign for the Red Cross War Fund in May 1918.[43]

We know little about Emma's activities in the 1920s. Mentions of her in social directories and newspapers were few and far between, which is not surprising given that after her divorce she could no longer count herself as a member of New York's most elite society. She reemerged briefly in December 1926 when her daughter Susan married Frederick Bull, a sportsman and businessman with interests in gold mining, who had only just divorced his first wife. Emma gave away the bride in what she told reporters was going to be "a very quiet home wedding."[44] Susan died a little over three years later – at the end of March 1929 – but, given a lack of published obituaries, it is impossible to ascertain her cause of death, or how Emma may have reacted to losing her child. In 1930, however, a glimpse into Emma's political views finally bubbles to the surface. That year, in early October to be precise, noted suffragette and founder of the Women's National Republican Club, Henrietta Wells Livermore launched a campaign to support Republican candidates in the upcoming state and local elections. Emma was appointed as one of the vice-chairmen of this campaign committee.[45] She continued to be active in the Women's National Republican Club after she returned from her Arctic trip in 1931, notably attending a luncheon at the end of October where Henrietta Livermore excoriated the well-to-do women in attendance for their political lethargy.[46] Unfortunately, none of these activities tells us what Emma thought about the Soviet experiment that she had just witnessed in such close detail; nor are her feelings concerning the political alternative that the USSR seemed to offer at this moment in time clear. Emma also did not know at this point that she had only a few months left to live.

The Trip

Having outlined as much as possible the main events and overall contours of Emma Burnham Dresser's life, it is fair to say that she remained a woman of some financial means, even as the Great Depression took root in the United States,

42. "Woman Captain Saves Life of Injured Horse," *The New York Times*, 11 November 1917, 6.

43. "12,000 Persons in the Parade Saturday Night," *Yonkers Statesman* (New York), 20 May 1918, 1.

44. "Bull, Divorced a Week, Today Will Wed Anew," *Daily News* (New York), 7 December 1926, 46.

45. "Mrs. Livermore Names Group," *Yonkers Statesman*, 10 October 1930, 10. On the history of the Women's National Republican Club, see "History," The Women's National Republican Club Inc., http://www.wnrc.org/history.html (accessed 2 July 2023).

46. "Political Lethargy of 'Comfortable' Women of County Rapped by Speaker," *The Daily Argus* (White Plains, NY), 23 October 1931, 8.

and that her apparently adventurous nature drove her to seek out thrilling travel opportunities. With those topics covered, it is time to look more closely at the trip she took in 1931. Despite the economic woes that affected much of the world at the end of the 1920s, the same era saw the Soviet government embrace the still lucrative international tourist trade and open its doors to thousands of foreigners in the decade prior to the start of the Second World War. The process began in 1928 when a partnership agreement was signed with noted travel company Thomas Cook, which allowed the firm, in conjunction with Cunard Line, to plan and book cruises that included the Soviet Union. Other shipping companies followed suit, meaning the Soviets soon had similar arrangements with Holland-America Line, Royal Mail Steam Packet, Hamburg-American and Canadian Pacific Steamship Line. Less than a year after its initial deal with Thomas Cook was inked, the Soviet government also ventured into the travel business itself by establishing Intourist (*Inostranyi turist*), a full-service travel agency, in April 1929.[47] The move was a successful one, with the Associated Press reporting in February 1930, "that last summer Russia was visited by 3000 foreigners, two-thirds of them being Americans."[48] Even more travelers followed in 1931, the year Emma journeyed to the Arctic. U.S. government statistics show that more than 50,000 American tourists visited Northern Europe, including the USSR, that year.[49] Many of them likely would have been assisted by Intourist, which was put on an even firmer footing when the agency was chartered as a legal entity in the United States in 1931. Based in Manhattan, Intourist's first office opened at 452 Fifth Avenue in New York City.

From there, Intourist launched vigorous multi-pronged advertising campaigns designed to court American travellers. It bought regular advertising in major metropolitan newspapers. It provided colourful promotional materials to travel agents across the US and offered visa processing services as part of its packages. For the New York market in particular, Intourist even branched out into radio programming. For example, in May 1931 – the month which coincided with the opening of the Soviet tourist season – Intourist bought airtime on local station WRNY 1,010 ke.[50] That year also happened to be one where Intourist promoted two special, one-of-a-kind adventure tours: an Old Turkestan tour that took visitors to Soviet Central Asia, and a 40-day Arctic tour. The latter was restricted to forty passengers, cost $2500 per person, and offered the chance to be present when the Soviet icebreaker *Malygin* met the famed *Graf Zeppelin* dirigible at the North Pole. It was, of course, this second trip that Emma Dresser decided to take. Long a resident of New York City, Emma may simply have dropped into Intourist's office to see what trips were on offer and stumbled across what surely

47. On the history of Intourist see, Shawn Salmon, "To the Land of the Future: A History of Intourist and Travel to the Soviet Union, 1929-1991," PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2008.

48. "Russian Tourist Crop," *The Tampa Tribune*, 9 February 1930, 37.

49. The precise figure – 52,646 people – is given in F.W. Ogilvie, *The Tourist Movement: An Economic Study* (London: P.S. King & Son Lt., 1933), 210.

50. Samantha Kravitz, "The Business of Selling the Soviet Union: Intourist and the Wooing of American Travelers, 1929-1939," MA Thesis, Concordia University, 2006, 67.

had to be considered the voyage of a lifetime, or perhaps she heard about the upcoming Arctic cruise on the radio. Certainly, with her previous record of big game hunting, Emma would have noticed, assuming that she came across them, that Intourist guidebooks from the early 1930s typically included special sections devoted to hunting.[51] Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly what it was that triggered Emma's interest in this trip. All we can say for certain is that Emma could not wait to set sail on her latest adventure.

Long before she set foot on any ship, Emma's plans were already being discussed by the press, although the news stories distributed by the United Press network in mid-May 1931 erroneously said that she would be travelling on the *Graf Zeppelin* during its forthcoming summer cruise to the Arctic, rather than aboard the Soviet icebreaker *Malygin*, which was expected to rendezvous with the dirigible in the vicinity of the North Pole.[52] The announcements made much of Emma's age – she was 61 years old by this time – and presented her as an adventurous soul who "has sailed twice around the world" as well as someone who handles unexpected setbacks – for instance when a severe sandstorm forced her plane to land in the Arabian desert during a previous trip to Asia Minor – well.[53] Emma herself reinforced this reputation, with her comment to reporters that she was taking along a high-powered rifle "just in case I happen to encounter a polar bear or a walrus."[54] She notably did not offer any remarks suggesting that she was interested in politics, the remaking of Soviet society that was underway at this time, or gender relations. Likely these things did not particularly matter to Emma, whose life in the US was materially comfortable, whose travels around the world were not affected by the state of international relations, and who had no husband to restrain her desire to travel. Instead, Emma's focus remained squarely on the possibility of adventure. Hence, it is not surprising that Emma singled out creatures that were known for their ferocity when she spoke to reporters. The polar bear, in particular, had figured prominently in public conceptions of the dangers of the Arctic for decades since it was, as one historian put it, the only "Arctic mammal [that] could rival the popularity of the big game of Africa and Asia".[55] Emma's prowess with her guns meant that she was frequently referred to as an "expert shot" in the newspapers, and not surprisingly hunting eventually featured

51 Kravitz, 78.

52. Interestingly, the only English-language scholarship exclusively focused on the *Malygin*'s 1931 voyage also contains factually inaccurate information. When discussing the foreign tourists on board, the article does not mention Emma, her son, or Elizabeth Patterson. Instead, the authors refer to "the indomitable American traveller Miss Louise Boyd." Presumably, they mean Emma whose middle name was Louise and whose last name Burnham could perhaps be mistaken for Boyd. William Barr and Evelyn S. Baldwin, "The First Tourist Cruise in the Soviet Arctic," *Arctic*, 33 No.4 (1980), 673.

53. "Aged New York Woman Signs for Zeppelin Voyage," *The Brainerd Daily Dispatch* (Brainerd, MN), 15 May 1931, 1.

54. "N.Y. Woman Signs For Graf Pole Trip," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 15 May 1931, 41.

55. Robert G. David, *The Arctic in the British Imagination, 1818-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 171.

in many of the stories that were published concerning Emma's 1931 trip.[56]

While these early articles may have gotten parts of the story wrong, they were right in one regard: Emma was going to be accompanied on this 40-day voyage by her son Daniel, who by then was apparently working as an automotive engineer in Detroit. Nor in the end did the pair wind up being the only Americans on board when the *Malygin* departed from Arkhangel'sk on 19 July 1931. Elizabeth Patterson (née Chapin), whose husband Kenneth was a New York stockbroker, also signed on to the trip.[57] Born in Chicago, IL in 1896, Elizabeth and her family moved to New York when she was five. At seventeen, she came out in society as a debutante, but her life soon began to fellow a less traditional path. She drove an ambulance for the American Motor Corps during the First World War. Elizabeth then got a job as an insurance broker; her career in that field eventually lasted more than thirty years. She married in 1927. By the time she boarded the *Malygin*, Patterson had already visited the Soviet Union twice, and she was said to own one of the best private collections of Russian icons – including icons that once belonged to the last Russian Emperor and his son – in the United States.[58] Despite the fact that she took a camera with her, and told the press that she intended to write about the trip once she returned, Patterson never did. Instead, she became an early devotee of Meher Baba, whom she met in November 1931.[59] She was instrumental in founding the Meher Spiritual Center in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and spent many years working with the poor in India. In addition, over the course of her long life, she served as the director of Chapin Co. (a department store), and as director and vice-president of the property development company, Myrtle Beach Farms Inc. Like Emma, Patterson lived an unconventional life, and it is unfortunate that sources do not reveal what the two women thought of one another.

After taking a train from Moscow to Arkhangel'sk, the trio of Americans boarded the *Malygi*n, and set sail at 1:30 pm on 19 July 1931. Conditions aboard the *Malygin* must have been spartan, even though this trip had been marketed to tourists. Unlike the luxury cruise ships that regularly plied routes in Scandinavian waters – and included stops in the Soviet Union in their itineraries – it is worth remembering that the *Malygin* was a working icebreaker. Built in 1912, the ship had 2800 horsepower, which meant it was considerably smaller (and less modern) than either *Krasin* or *Yermak*, the two other Soviet icebreakers then

56. "N.Y. Woman Signs For Graf Pole Trip," *The Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 15 May 1931, 41.

57. Concerning Elizabeth Patterson, see "N.Y. Society Women on Soviet Arctic Ship," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 July, 1931, 2; "Wife of Ex-Omahan Man Aboard Maligin," *Omaha World-Herald*, 27 July 1931, 3; "Had Thrill on Icebreaker," *The Morning News* (Wilmington, DE), 11 September 1931, 5; "Elizabeth C. Patterson, Businesswoman, Dies," *The Charlotte Observer*, 7 December 1980, 22; and "Elizabeth Chapin Patterson 'Dilruba'," *Meher Baba's Life and Travels*, https://www.meherbabatravels.com/his-close-ones/women/elizabeth-patterson-1/. [Accessed 15 July 2023]

58. Two Women Here Join Polar Venture," *The New York Times*, 15 July 1931, 21.

59. On Meher Baba, see Tom Hopkinson and Dorothy Hopkinson, *The Silent Messenger: The Life and Work of Meher Baba* (Winchester: Gollancz, 1974).

patrolling Arctic waters.[60] While Emma and her son offered few details about their experiences on board ship, apart from Emma telling reporters that they found everything "extremely interesting and entirely comfortable," that may not have been the whole truth.[61] Only a few days into the trip, the *Malygin*'s refrigerators broke down, which led to all of the perishable food on board spoiling.[62] Suddenly, hunting took on a greater urgency, since it was no longer just for sport. By 23 July, the party had shot its first bear.[63]

The much-hyped 27 July meeting between the Soviet icebreaker and the German dirigible proved to be more anti-climatic than dramatic. Passengers aboard the *Graf Zeppelin* spotted the *Malygin* a bit after 6 pm. Anchored in an open bay off Hooker Island, the ship was decorated with flags and pennants, and used its whistles to sound a welcome. The two vessels had to remain several hundred yards apart, however, since any stray sparks from *Malygin*'s smokestack could have set the *Graf Zeppelin* ablaze. Crews from both ships were soon frantically working to finish an exchange of mail that had been promised to postal collectors since the sale of these items was partially funding the *Graf Zeppelin*'s voyage.[64] Neither captain was keen to linger, so as Arthur Koestler – then a young journalist sending dispatches from the *Graf Zeppelin* – noted the "whole adventurous rendezvous had lasted exactly thirteen minutes."[65] Neither Emma nor her son mentioned the rendezvous when they spoke to reporters in Moscow in August 1931.

This brief moment was followed by many uneventful days cruising through fields of ice at a slow pace owing to dense fog. Emma eventually tried her hand at hunting, killing a bear and several reindeer before her rifle jammed, something which broke her eyeglasses.[66] Once the ship reached Rudolf Island, the Dressers were party of a group that visited the camp established by American explorer Anthony Fiala in 1905. There they found a cache of canned food and other supplies, but many of the items were now damaged or had disintegrated. According to a story distributed by the Associate Press in August, at "the request of Fiala, who is a friend of the family, the Dressers are taking back to him his ship's clock, which was found in his shack and which ran perfectly when it was thawed out, a

60. John McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38.

61. "U.S. Woman Back From Arctic Tour," *Evening Star (Washington, DC), 24 August 1931, 16.*

62. Ibid.

63. Papanin remembered that the bear was wounded by a German journalist and then finished off by "the American Dresser." Papanin, *Led i plamen'*, 75.

64. Douglas Botting, *Dr. Eckener's Dream Machine: The Graf Zeppelin and the Dawn of Air Travel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001), 221-22.

65. Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue* (London: Collins with Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1952), 296.

66. "Mother of Detroiter Sorry to Quit Arctic," *The Detroit Free Press*, 24 August 1931, 1.

telescope, three books and an umbrella."[67] When Fiala was asked about the items a couple of months later, he indicated that he was not surprised Emma had found them for she had brought a chart showing the location of the cache with her on the trip. As he put it, "so once there it was presumably easy enough for her to find."[68]

While American newspapers made much of Emma's activities, although it does not appear that reporters pressed her on political matters or socio-economic developments in the USSR, Soviet accounts of the voyage of the *Malygin* were considerably different. The trip fell at an interesting moment for the Soviet government. The adoption of the First Five-Year Plan at the end of the 1920s changed both the landscape of the country and the economic priorities of the regime. With the plan came a renewed interest in science, machinery, and flight. As a result, the late 1902s became, as historian Richard Stites has noted, a time when the "cult of the machine and image of an electrified nation saturated the arts as well as the political discourse…"[69] Moreover, this emphasis continued well into the 1930s with aviation and exploration garnering more and more coverage in Soviet media. Indeed, between 1933 and 1937, almost two-thirds of *Pravda*'s editorials on science and technology had to do with record-setting flights or geographic expeditions.[70]

In 1931, each of the three most important Soviet newspapers – *Pravda*, *Izvestiia* and *Komsomol'skaia Pravda* – had a special correspondent aboard the icebreaker. It was their job to transmit a daily update via the ship's radio; however, their work was initially hampered by stringent rules concerning the number of words that they could send.[71] Updates from the first few days of the trip sometimes contained fewer than 50 words, meaning it was hard for the journalists to speak effusively about what was happening. However, these short items still managed to follow the current line and cast the voyage as one of scientific research and discovery by regularly mentioning scholars and experiments. For example, on 25 July 1931, *Pravda* informed its readers that systematic meteorological observations were being conducted under the supervision of Prof. Vize, one of the expedition's most important scientists.[72] A week later, *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*'s special correspondent, Mikhail Rozenfel'd wrote at some length about another professor on board the *Malygin* who was studying the flying capabilities of birds in the Arctic, as well as about the contribution that the northernmost radio

67. "Woman Kills Bear in Arctic Region," *The Boston Globe*, 24 August 1931, 2. In his memoirs, Soviet explorer Ivan Papanin says that the recovered items were given to the Museum of the Arctic in Leningrad. See Papanin, *Led i plamen'*, 80. However, at least one US newspaper account said that the clock was stolen once the *Malygin* returned to Arkhangelsk. "Cache Find Stirs Fiala Hopes of New Expedition to Explore Arctic Wastes," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 9 October 1931, 47.

68. "Cache Find Stirs Fiala Hopes…," 47.

69. Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 169.

70. Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture From Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 100.

71. Papanin, *Led i plamen'*,75. As the voyage progressed, Soviet authorities increased the number of words each journalist was allowed to transmit each day.

72. "Reis 'Malygina'," *Pravda,* 25 July 1931, 4.

station in the region was providing in terms of weather data to Soviet scientists.[73] When Soviet newspapers did mention the foreigners sailing on the *Malygin*, they referred to them only by the generic collective noun "tourists."[74] No details about nationality or gender were given. And, with the exception of General Umberto Nobile who joined the crew on the icebreaker in the hopes of finding evidence of what happened to some of his crew members lost when the airship *Italia* crashed in the Arctic in 1928, none of the tourists was mentioned by name. The same can be said about the retroactive accounts written by Ivan Papanin and Vladimir Vize. In other words, Soviet media and officials never viewed this trip via the lens of adventure tourism; instead, it was merely one of a series of scientific expeditions that the government engaged in in the 1920s and 1930s.

Passenger lists show that Emma and her son finally arrived back in New York when Holland-American line's the *Statendam* docked on 3 October 1931. A final flurry of newspaper articles appeared and, yet again, they did not include anything that could be construed as political commentary. Instead, this time the articles singled out how close Emma had come to the North Pole while also noting that this was further north than any woman had previously been.[75] As one headline put it: "Trip Put Woman Near World Top."[76] The emphasis on gender was not new, however. Time and again, when reporters discussed Emma's trip to the Arctic, they used the word "woman" in their headlines, often accompanied by the words "Arctic" or "polar." In that most desolate of regions, Emma was said to have found "thrills," and to have engaged in behaviors that many people at the time likely would have associated more with men than women, as when she shot a bear.[77] It is worth remembering that for decades, most Americans, to quote historian Michael Robinson, would have said that voyaging to polar regions "had value in illustrating the good character of American men under terrible conditions."[78] Yet, here was a woman – a former socialite, now in her sixties – treading much the same path as the men who came before her and serving as quite an advertisement for adventure tourism.

The trip on the *Malygin* served as a fitting last hurrah for Emma, who died after an operation at Doctors Hospital in Manhattan on 30 December 1931. She left what was for the day a considerable estate – valued at $247,654 (net) and mostly in securities – to her son Daniel, but the press did not dwell at any great length on these financial matters, preferring instead to return to her most recent

73. "Kurs na sever," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 1 August 1931, 4.

74. For example, see "Radio s ledokola 'Malygin'," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 31 July 1931, 4; and "'Malygin' derzhit kurs k zemle Rudol'fa," *Komsomol'skaia Pravda*, 3 August 1931, 4.

75. See, for instance, "Woman, 62, Braves Arctic," *Oakland Tribune*, 7 October 1931, 11.

76. "Trip Put woman Near World Top," *The Spokesman Review* (Spokane), 18 October 1931, 22.

77. "Woman, 62, Finds Thrills in Arctic," *The Morning News* (Wilmington, DE), 24 August 1931, 2.

78. Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 6.

adventure when her death was mentioned.[79] That ensured that she remained "Emma Burnham Dresser, traveler and hunter, who made a trip on a Soviet icebreaker in 1931 at the age of 63 [sic] years to shoot polar bear and reindeer" in the eyes of the public.[80]

Conclusion

Historians have long been fascinated by the travelers who visited the Soviet Union prior to the start of the Second World War and have offered an array of motivations for those trips. However, Emma Burnham Dresser did not go to the USSR because she believed in the social experiment that was happening within its borders. Nothing of what we know of her background indicates that she had even a passing interest in Marxism. Instead, what Emma did possess was a thirst for adventure, meaning her trip to the Arctic was a kind of capstone to a long list of exotic experiences that her continued wealth and social status had afforded her throughout her life. Even after a very public scandal led to financial ruin – at least from the perspective of New York's 'the 400' – and her very public divorce closed many doors to this socialite, Emma continued to seek out new adventures that ordinary Americans could only read about in newspapers. Undoubtedly, she was not the sole adventurer to venture onto Soviet soil, or in this case waters, either. Commerce Department figures show the appeal of the USSR as a destination even in the worst years of the Depression: American expenditures on travel to the Soviet Union grew from roughly $2 million in 1929 to $10 million two years later.[81] Indeed, the only destinations that saw growing demand from travelers in these years were the USSR and the British West Indies.[82] Still, Emma's trip stands out for its exoticism and it serves as a reminder that scholars must take a wide lens when they consider why Americans went to the Soviet Union in the 1930s or our knowledge of international tourism at this time will remain incomplete.

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79. "Mrs. E.B. Dresser Left $247,654," *The New York Times*, 12 June 1934, 28.
80. Ibid.
81. Figures quoted in Kravitz, *The Business of Selling*, 52.
82. Kravitz, *The Business of Selling*, 52.

"It is an experience which never lacks interest": John Paton Davies' Letters from Postwar Moscow

Kristina V. Minkova

John Paton Davies Jr. was born in China in 1908 into a family of American Baptist missionaries. Throughout his life he had the warmest relationship with his parents. Davies received his education in the United States and China, graduated from Columbia University in 1931 and immediately entered the diplomatic careers. In 1933, after a short-time service as a Vice-Consul in Windsor, Ontario, he was sent to China and remained there until 1940. In August 1942, John Davies married Patricia Louise Grady (1920–2000), daughter of American diplomat Henry F. Grady (1882–1957),[1] for love. Patricia played a significant part in Davies' work and was known as a well-educated, keenly observant, and broad-minded person. From early 1942 until the end of 1944, Davies served in the China-Burma-India Theater under Generals J. Stilwell, A. Wedemeyer, and P. Hurley. He was a member of the Dixie Mission, a group of American officers and diplomats (United States Army Observation Group) tasked with establishing official US diplomatic and military ties with the Chinese Communists. Davies considered the group's task to minimize the influence of the USSR on the Chinese communist movement, but at the same time believed that the government of Chiang Kai-shek was hopeless and the future of China lay with the communists. As a result of his conflict with General Hurley, the personal representative of President Franklin D. Roosevelt under Chiang Kai-shek, the latter secured Davis's transfer to Moscow as second (and then first) secretary of the US Embassy.

John Davies and Patricia lived in Moscow from March 1945 to April 1947. Upon returning from Moscow, John Davies worked in the Policy Planning Staff, the US Department of State, until 1952. Then he directed the Office of Political Affairs, served as a U.S. High Commissioner for Germany and ended up as a Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Peru. However, after Senator McCarthy and his followers started a wide anti-communist campaign which affected many Soviet studies specialists and respective Department of State officials in the USA, Davies

1. In 1941, Grady was elected president of the shipowner American President Lines, and in October 1945, he was appointed personal representative of President Truman on the Allied Election Supervision Commission in Greece. Subsequently, Grady was involved in solving the Palestine problem ("Morrison-Grady Plan"), was the first US Ambassador to India (1947–1948), then Ambassador to Nepal (1948), Greece (1948–1950) and Iran (1950–1951).

was accused of having contributed to the American loss of China. In 1954, after Davies refused to resign voluntarily under this pressure, he was fired by CIA Chief Allen Dulles as a person bearing risk to the security of the United States. After his dismissal, Davies went into business in Peru. In 1969, all charges against him were lifted. Davies died in 1999 at the age of 91. He authored two memoirs, *Foreign and Other Affairs* (1964) and *Dragon By the Tail* (1972).

Returning directly to Davies's Moscow activities, we can learn that his personal letter dated January 26, 1945, reveals his utmost interest in receiving an assignment to Moscow:

"My plans for the future are uncertain. Jack returned with the story that I was going to Moscow, but George Merrell[2] came back day before yesterday with the statement that Paul Meyer,[3] in John Carter's[4] absence, did not know where I would be sent. So I sit and wait and bide my time. If I am to go to Moscow, I shall be pleased."[5]

For the US Embassy in the USSR, he was also quite a valuable acquisition, since, while still in China, he prepared reports on the interests of the Soviet government in the Far East.[6] On May 13, 1945, General Wedemeyer, under whom Davies served in China, wrote to the US Ambassador in Moscow Averell Harriman: "Dear Averell! Recently one of my best political advisers, John Davis, was assigned to Moscow. Here he aroused universal admiration and respect and showed himself to be a very capable analyst and tireless worker. Our loss is, of course, your gain, and his knowledge of the situation in China will be especially useful to you now, when everyone's attention is focused on this part of the world."[7]

John and Patricia Davies arrived in Moscow on March 25, 1945. At first, they were sheltered by Ambassador Harriman in Spaso-house, his residence in Moscow. While staying there, the Davies went to work at the Embassy office located on Mokhovaya str. 13. Later on, they got an apartment there on one of the top floors – with a stunningly beautiful view of the Kremlin and Red Square.[8]

John and Patricia Davies' letters, which had never been printed before, were discovered by the author in John Davies Papers, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Archives. It seems that John was quite a diligent correspondent, so

2. George Robert Merrell Jr. (1898 – 1962) was an American diplomat. During the WWII, he first served as the US consul in Calcutta, then was promoted to consul general and served simultaneously in Calcutta and Kabul. In early 1945, Merrell was appointed by President Roosevelt to serve as the United States Minister to India. Hence, in January 1945, he was in Washington, waiting for his assignment.

3. Paul Meyer served in the Division for Cultural Relations, US Department of State.

4. Davies supposedly means John Carter Vincent (1900–1972) – American diplomat and one of the "China Hands."

5. Adressee not stated. January 26, 1945. The Truman Library. John Paton Davies Papers. Box 11.

6. For example, *China and the Kremlin*. January 4, 1945 // The Truman Library. John Davies Paton Papers. Box 11.

7. Wedemeyer to Harriman. May 13, 1945 // The Truman Library. John Paton Davies Papers. Box 11. APO 855.

8. J.P. Davies, *Dragon By the Tail; American, British, Japanese, and Russian Encounters with China and One Another* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972).

initially there should have been more letters. The existing ones were probably donated to the Archive by the family. Some letters might have been lost because John's parents were moving to China and back. Why is this correspondence important and thought to be worth sharing with wider audience?

First of all, the two dozen letters that survived prove to be a really valuable source of information about the diplomats' everyday life in immediate postwar Soviet Union, their supplies and their impressions of surviving behind the "Iron Curtain." Indeed, we have little relatively independent evidence to assess life in Moscow in the early postwar months. Such sources include the diaries and memoirs of George F. Kennan, Davies's immediate superior in Moscow, and the memoirs of the first Canadian envoy (and later ambassador) to the USSR, L. Dana Wilgress. Both sources are of great historical importance, but not without a degree of subjectivity, as both authors had previously been to Soviet Russia, spoke Russian, and were generally much more immersed in Russian history and culture. In a sense, Davies's letters are a perfect complement to the books by American journalists William White *Report on the Russians* and Ella Winter *I Saw the Russian People*, as they describe the top Soviet party officials and the private lives of diplomats – such areas of Moscow life to which journalists did not always have access. Special attention goes to Davies' vocabulary which brings us eighty years back into the personal encounters of educated mid-class Americans. We cite these letters here as fully as possible omitting only very private details concerning family members.

When we read Davies's very personal letters addressed to his family, we must take into account the fact that although they were sent by diplomatic bag, they could potentially fall into the wrong hands. It seems that these considerations, especially since early 1946, when relations between the USSR and the USA began to rapidly deteriorate, may have led Davies to be rather restrained in describing the realities of Soviet life and stick mainly to general topics and presentation of family news. Strangely enough, it did not prevent him from describing some Soviet political leaders in a very ironic and uncomplimentary style.

Letter 1 (June 27, 1945)

Dear family (separate copies: Parents, Flossie, Marty, Don[9])

A letter from father and one from mother came this past week. The one from mother addressed directly to this office and not addressed to the Department and marked "Forward by Moscow pouch" took 3 months to get here. Father's came by the Dept and took 3 weeks. I don't think there is much difference between the APO address and the Department. The latter is probably slower, due to censorship at the Department, which is notoriously dilatory. <…>

In the mean time we have had Poles making a Government and Poles being

9. Rebecca Florence Davies (Flossie, 1890–1981) was John's aunt. She was also a notable person – a woman editor of the *Detroit News*. Marty and Don are John's sister and brother.

tried, we have had visiting scientists (including Henry Field,[10] Marty), we have had and still have a Reparations Commission, and finally on Sunday we had a Victory Parade reviewed by Marshals Zukov and Rokossovsky on white horses. Ivan the Terrible's head-chopping-off block on Red Square was built upward to form a fountain which played with beauty and redundance during the heavy rain which lasted throughout the parade. It was like the May Day parade, massed men, massed horses, massed artillery, massed katoushkas,[11] massed motorcycles, massed tanks and massed Soviet WACs. From our Embassy we watched the enormous spectacle form and flow into and across the Red Square half a mile away. Entrance to Red Square and the big square on which our Embassy faces was by frequently checked tickets. Only the Ambassador, his daughter Kathleen, his First Secretary interpreter and our top military and naval people got in. As for the populace of Moscow, they could only see the parade as it formed away from our square or broke up after leaving Red Square. It was like May Day a more or less private parade.

Patricia and I usually go to work in the morning by subway where we rub shoulders with the Muscovite. It is an experience which never lacks interest – everyone shabbily dressed, no gay faces, most people pasty-faced, no animated chatter, and always a feeling of primitive force despite malnutrition and crushing burdens. The women are the amazing people of Russia. "We were saved by our women", a Russian told Patricia and me. They are seemingly as tough and husky as the men. Not big (for neither are the men) but husky in the sense of amazing endurance. Even the gnarled, wizened little old women.

Our love to you all,

John

Letter 2 (September 3, 1945)

Hi y'a,

Now it's me, Patricia, to add my badly-typed but very earnest thanks for the largess that has descended upon us. We are now a capitalistic world in the communistic universe. The wonders of our world are not, however, on those of purer and less material thought around us. As a matter of fact, we're practically an American showcase. Your welcome contributions make good propaganda – and, more important to me, at least – living very pleasant.

The dozens of little things that we received are the difference between existing and the "gracious living" that one reads about in Good Housekeeping. Thank you, thank you, one and all for your many contributions in time, energy and thoughtfulness. We are more grateful than you can know.

10. Henry Field (1902–1986) was an American anthropologist and archaeologist. In 1941, President Roosevelt made Field the "Anthropologist to the President" and a member of the Special Intelligence Unit of the White House to direct a top-secret migration project.

11. John means "Katyusha" – Soviet multiple rocket launcher invented during the WWII. These launchers could deliver explosives to a target area more intensively than conventional artillery. It is believed that this invention added greatly to the Soviet victory.

Last night we stood in Red Square with most of the rest of Moscow and watched the salute for the end of the Japanese war. Anti-climaticness was the keynote of the atmosphere. Flags, rockets, guns, myriad colored searchlights notwithstanding, the feeling was on of fatigue, not victory. A sensationless celebration for a sensationless war.

And now that the war is over, what happens to all of you? Will Don take off his sailor suit, will Marty go to Waikiki? Will the Davies continue to be scattered over the face of the earth? Perhaps if we tune in again in a few weeks, we will find out what is happening to our heroes and heroines. We hope to be kept informed.

This branch of the family is a pretty well set for another six months. If it proves to be as interesting as the first six months has been, we could not ask for more. I don't think we will have cause to be disappointed.

This postscript must come to an end. And this seems a logical place for it. A kiss to each of you and oceans of love and gratitude.

Devotedly,

Pat

Letter 3 (September 30, 1945)

Dear family,

Did I tell you that all of our boxes have arrived? Yes, I guess I did. The stuff which you all sent came in fine shape, very little breakage. The little knick-knacks which you so painstakingly got together, mother and Flossie, are proving invaluable. And the material for curtains and chair coverings are superb. The maids' uniforms are being revised somewhat downward as our maids turn out to be about the size of Pinky Carroll[12] rather than the gargantuan proportions which I indicated. Fortunately, Maia the cook is a good seamstress and so is making the changes herself. Poor Flossie, we have certainly pulled a lot of revised plans on you.

The calcium tablets in the airmail letters have arrived, father and mother, and how ingeniously you did them up. We chew them dutifully but with wry faces and hope that our bones and teeth benefit. The mending wool also came and is filling holes in sox. Colors are fine. <>

You ask, father, how you in the USA are to get a true picture of life in the USSR. It is perhaps a more difficult thing to do than to convey a true picture of China. I shan't attempt it here. I will say, however, that having been in the Orient I think it is easier to understand the USSR than if I had come from the USA or western Europe. I think it was Lenin who said something about swinging from uncontrolled violence to the most delicate deceit.

And so – love to you all,

John

12. Georgia "Pinky" Carroll was a wife and artistic muse of John Carroll, an American artist famous for his "delicate gazelle-eyed girls who look as if they were made of whipped cream and moonlight" as *Life* put it in an article dated November 13, 1940.

Letter 4 (October 12, 1945)

Dear scattered family,

The news of Don's new job is exciting and gratifying. And it is wonderful that Marty is going to be able to follow you, Don. Patricia and I agree that all in all it is a fine deal. It eases the transition from your former job to whatever you may want to do later on. For that matter, speaking as rank outsiders and uninitiates, we don't see what is so bad about a naval career. It is certainly no worse than a foreign service one. But you know what you want. And as you have time to look around you can make a sound decision.

So, you are thinking of going back to your adopted home, father and mother. It doesn't surprise me, I imagine that you will really be happier there than Pittsburg for next few years. After a few years I imagine that wex shall shake down enough to know pretty well where we are all going to be – or not be. And make plans accordingly.

We are still finding life here exciting. It's a pretty grim place in a lot of ways, but is mentally so exciting that the latter phase of life here is more than adequate compensation. I like the Russian people. They are robust, simple and emotional. The Government (which includes Party in ordinary definition) is beyond belief. It is a composite of the Inquisition, Ghengis Khan, and high-powered public relations. It plays all angles: labor, the Orthodox Church, racial "nationalities" such as the Armenians, and all with the utmost cynicism and pretty consistent success. The outsider has no conception of how ramified and secretive the system is. What this country needs is an Admiral Peary[13] to open it up.

The thing that drives me wild is to see them grabbing our slogans and programs and turning them against us. Democracy, for example. Their democracy, as is now becoming evident to outside world, is totally different from what we mean by the word. And what the Chinese mean by the word, perhaps including the Chinese communists. And so it goes through the whole range of political philosophy. Definition in terms is the only thing which will clarify their program. Semantics. The meaning of meaning. So under the colors of democracy they grab and run with the ball. All we seem to be doing is figuring out line defense forming up for defense while the ball is loose and we might pick it up and run with it. You don't block off an ideology with force – not for long. They recognize a crying demand for reform, for change, revolution – not in their own area, of course, but in the areas which they intend to penetrate. Nobody else has a constructive program adequate to meet the demand. So they come in with a phoney wrapped up in the guise of the real thing [and] enjoy some success. And the irony of the situation is that the guise is usually something entirely acceptable as something which we might put forward with all sincerity.

But it is not as bad as all that. The people on whom this gag is worked soon catch on and most of them turn – as has already happened in the Balkans. But unfortunately, people don't count for much against a machine of the sort these

13. Robert Edwin Peary Sr. (1856–1920) was an American explorer and Navy officer. He made several important expeditions to the Arctic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In April 1909, he became the first to have reached the geographic North Pole.

boys start going. We shall see.

Flossie, we are sending you for the storage of hanging in your house a couple of souvenirs of yesteryear. Would you keep them for us? Thank you for doing so.

Love,

John

Letter 5 (October 19, 1945)

My sweet thoughtful parents,

The calcium tablets are lots of fun. Particularly their method of arrival – in very welcome pretty handkerchiefs, in a warm and wonderful pair of stockings. What a lot of trouble you have taken to send them. And they came as quickly as letters. I'm afraid we are a great deal of bother to you. That's what comes of living in a commercial vacuum like Moscow.

We woke this morning to a full-fledged blizzard. Five inches of snow had fallen during the early morning hours and continues on its misty crystal way. People hurrying across beaten paths in front of the Embassy look as if they were finding their way through a great snow covered field. Because the streets in the Kremlin area are so fantastically wide, under snow this section looks little like a city. The Kremlin looks mellow and strong under its white blanket with its newly-gilded onion domes glistening frostily like trimmings on an extravagant Paris hat. This is Moscow as I imagined it to look… cold, silent and austerely beautiful.

Fleece-lined boots and fur hats have suddenly blossomed forth. John, to date has resolutely refused to don his exotic fur chapeau. He seems to feel there is something inappropriate about wearing such a bonnet in October. But this snow should force the issue. We are now beginning to realize the advantages of leaving and working in the same building. As the blizzards rage outside we have only to walk up or down a few flights of stairs to get from our place of living to our place of toil. It more than makes up for the disadvantages of being close enough to the office to be always on call.

We have been able to make little progress on our redecorating scheme. Our bright new dining room curtains are made and up, but the massive project of our enormous studio window has yet to be started. We are awaiting the second installment of curtain material from Flossie. It should be here soon. Our upholstering plans are slow to mature, also, because the Embassy shares the services of one upholsterer and although we have been on the list for some time, we have not reached the top of the list. However, soon, we hope. The manana spirit is not confined to Latin America though it goes by the name of "zavtra" or "si chass."[14]

The theatrical and musical season is hitting its full stride now. We have been very lax in taking advantage of the countless performances to see and hear. Theater-going requires a fair amount of forward planning and we, very lazily, forget to do anything about tickets until too late. Still we have attended a fair cross-section of the goings on and with few exceptions have thoroughly enjoyed them

14. "Tomorrow" and "now" in Russian.

all. The music and ballet are particularly wonderful. We seem to be perpetually busy so the problem of filling in spare time has yet to arise.

Last week I went with Kathleen Harriman and a nice WAC aide of General Eisenhower's to the Ballet School. It is justly famous. The beginning classes (9 years old) are especially appealing. We watched the second year class at their exercises and they are amazingly proficient. The best ones in even the very young classes dance in some of the ballets at the big Moscow theaters. It is a demanding life with nine years of schooling, plus experience in the theaters at night, then graduated into a full-time life of more training and more appearances. After a visit to the school it is quite obvious to even the untutored eye why Russia stands at the peak of ballet proficiency. <…>

As you know, our own plans continue to be vague. John is doing a splendid job here (I am not alone in that opinion) and is learning a great deal. Both of us feel that a year here is not long enough to get the flavor of Russia. We are hoping that we will be able to stay about a year and one half. But that lies in the laps of the Department. Meanwhile we absorb as much as we can and struggle with the dreadful language. The latter is a discouraging prospect but hope springs eternal. <…>

So, for the nonce, my warmest love,
Patricia

Letter 6 (October 22, 1945)

Dear family,

A shipment of Christmas packages arrived the other day in excellent time, everything considered. They came the APO route. My itchy fingers opened them – just to make sure that they were Christmas packages. But Patricia sternly forbade me to pry further. I cannot guarantee, however, to hold my curiosity in check. Thank you for them in advance as you thought of us in advance.

Speaking of Christmas, Patricia and I are tentatively planning to spend it in Athens. We heard yesterday noon, while at the Ambassador's for lunch, that Dr. Grady is heading some commission to supervise the Greek elections. It came in over a BBC broadcast. Poor man, it is going to be a difficult and thankless job.<…>

We have been having what virtually amounts to a blizzard during the past three days. So the heat has been turned on in the building. And although it is not as warm as an American apartment house, we manage to keep warm, providing that we wear sweaters. You ask about our food, mother. We do all right what with

our purchases from the Russian food stores and from our commissary.[15] Our little commissary is a miniature American grocery and toiletries shop. It is supposed to round out what isn't available from Soviet sources – and does so well enough. What we lack, of course, is fresh fruits and vegetables and milk. But we see what the average Russian eats and are profoundly grateful. Many people live on little more than sour black bread and little cabbage. And this summer has been so rainy and sunless that the vegetable crop has been a failure. And by vegetables I mean potatoes – which is tough. Life is unbelievably hard for most Russians. We know people who have lived through several winters without any heat in their rooms, with no hot water and with just enough gas to have maybe one or two hot meals a day. But if you have nothing to cook but black bread, what need have you of cooking. Of course, they aren't happy about it. They bear it because of their terrific animal vitality – and some because of their faith.

You were very cute, mother, about that nightgown for Patricia. I don't recall it and probably bought it for just such a contingency as this. I showed your letter to Patricia who was delighted with it and said, "Your mother is wonderful." I agree.

With love,
John

Letter 7 (January 5, 1946)

Dear family,

Outside the window in the early evening darkness a tall Christmas tree is sparkling in red, orange and green lights. It stands in the center of a little bazar built in the midst of the great square in front of the Embassy. I have just come back from the bazar, tiny booths erected on the caked snow and selling green oranges, shoddy dolls, vodka, cold buns and copies of the Stalin Constitution. The empty-lived people of Moscow wander around, buy little and listen to the loud speakers mooing Russian folk songs. A few children, bundled so that only their noses show, are hopping about in unsteady dances. It's fundamentally a pretty dreary spectacle.

The other evening Patricia and I listened to 96 recordings of various Russian songs. The overall impression was one of alternate melancholy and vitality. As George Kennan said, "You'd be melancholy, too, if you had to live your life through a cycle of mud and sow with a mostly grey sky overhead and the steppes never-ending all around." So when you break out of the melancholy you burst forth with abandon.

15. See Olga N Barkova, "Osobennosti organizacii v SSSR sistemy prodovol'stvennogo snabzhenija inostrannyh diplomatov i chlenov ih semej v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny 1941-1945 gg." [Special Features of the Food Supply Organization for Foreign Diplomats and their Families in the USSR During the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945]. *Proceedings of III International Symposium " Tradicionnaja kul'tura v sovremennom mire. Istorija edy i tradicii pitanija narodov mira"* [Traditional culture in the modern world. History of food and food traditions of the peoples of the world]. October 27–29, 2017. Vol. III. Moscow, 2017. P. 169–180.

Christmas Eve, I have not yet told you, I went with the Secretary's party to a dinner given by Stalin in the Kremlin.[16] Up the long, long marble stairs of the Tsars' palace, stairs covered with red carpet, to a large anteroom dominated by an enormous painting of the Tsar Alexander II visiting one of his villages. The through several corridors past ramrod-stiff NKVD guards at every few yards, through the banquet hall to a gilt and plush reception room where some of the lesser luminaries were waiting. After standing around with our hands in our pockets for about 15 minutes someone whispered, "Here he comes." A little grey man in a soldier suit padded through the banquet hall toward us, followed by a retinue of the other big names – Molotov, Beriya (head of the NKVD), Malenkov (party boss) and others. He passed down the line of foreigners, a quick shake of the hand, a look in the eye, a pleasant greeting – an Asiatic peasant grandpappy. The rest of the gang shook a few hands then stopped, obviously finding the whole performance rather distasteful and a waste of time.

We went into a typically Slavic groaning board – caviar to cream puffs. I was, of course, at one of the ends of the table of about fifty and because of my lowly position was able to concentrate on watching and listening rather than conversing and proposing toasts. Byrnes was genially full of Irish-Southern charm, Stalin always down to earth and easily the bests of the toast makers, Bevin blunt and – in the setting – inappropriately outspoken about the struggles and hopes of the common man. Molotov was the toastmaster and was surprisingly animated.

The men around Stalin are an extraordinary group of human beings. They look as if they have never been exposed to sunlight – pallid and fat. That's the political boys – the marshals are ruddy and fat. Mikoyan, with whom I sampled cordials after dinner, is an exception. He is a swarthy Armenian with a broken hooked nose on whose head the British had put a price after the last war (a bit embarrassing today). I rather liked Mikoyan. Like Stalin and Marshal Bulganin he seemed normal.

After coffee and liquors, we went into view a movie in the palace projection room. An NKVD general stood as guard near Stalin throughout the show. It was a comfortable little movie house with tables in front of the seats. The tables were laden with fruit and champagne. Throughout the show waiters poured coffee and brought around titbits. It was a documentary film of the USSR's part in the war against Japan. I can safely say that it would be unsuitable for showing to the Marines.

Then we went home, back through the corridors, past the guards in their blue-topped caps, past the enormous painting, under cascade after cascade of chandeliers and down the long, long red carpeted marble staircase.

We went back to an American Christmas Eve party at Spaso with a loaded buffet and a Soviet dance orchestra made up of unhappy Finns and Czechs who had under a mis-apprehension fled to this workers paradise. It was a good party,

16. Davies is referring to the December 1945 visit of the American delegation led by Secretary of State J. Byrnes to the USSR to participate in the Moscow session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the USSR, USA and Great Britain.

everybody was happy, and Patricia looked very pretty with a little red sequined hat on her head.

I was able to crash sessions of the conference and was, of course, delighted to be able to see how diplomatic jinks operate. You have presumably seen the pictures which my anthropoid friend Reynolds took, so I needn't describe the setting. Other light commentary I shall have to save until I see you.

Dear me. I've almost forgotten the purpose of this letter. To thank Flossie, mother and father for the goodies (which Patricia has acknowledged with more eloquence than I) and the ties and handkerchiefs. And to thank Don and Marty for the fine sweater which I am at this moment wearing. Because of your thoughtfulness it was a very merry Christmas. <…>

Love to you all

John

Letter 8 (January 26, 1946)

Dear family,

Two nice letters from mother arrived with the couriers today telling of Christmas with Flossie. <…>

Our Ambassador left two or three days ago, returning by way of China, Japan and Korea. I nearly went along – he said that he wanted to take me along on the basis of fun, but that I had better take a vacation tour through the Near East – Tehran, Baghdad, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Ankara, Istanbul, Athens and Sofia. He said that such a trip would serve to widen my experience. And besides, this way, Patricia can go with me and we can see her father in Athens. From the professional point of view it is better that I make this junket – and as far as Patricia is concerned, she is enchanted: she doesn't have to stay on here alone, she has a sunny vacation and she sees her pappy. But I am talking as if the trip is all laid on. It isn't yet. The Ambassador has asked for permission, but we haven't yet heard from the Dept. I think it will come through alright. If and when it does, we plan to leave early in February and to be gone something over a month.

Don't worry about Patricia's traveling in her present condition. Thank heavens she is no hypochondriac. She is healthy as they come, in good spirits and prettier than ever. I can now understand why some of the early Italian painters presented their loveliest ladies with the slight distentions of five months.

Which reminds me, mother, Patricia and I were chuckling today over your advice that we must remember to forgive, apologize make-up. We chuckled because we don't quarrel. We are appallingly congenial. Patricia has the temperament of an easy-going cheery cherub. You remember me as a stubborn adolescent, mother. And I was. I am still stubborn, but not in my domestic life – that is, not very often. And when I am, Patricia just plays the indulgent role.

She went to a Soviet doctor today, her first check-up, you will be distressed to hear. He is a very good doctor. He pronounced her hearty and hale and was pleased with the way everything was progressing. She was accompanied by a very

nice Englishwoman who has just had twins here and therefore knows all the ropes. It was quite an interview. I shall let her tell you about it.

Love to all,
John

Letter 9 (February 10, 1946)

Dear family,

Patricia and I were sorry to hear of your bronchitis and cold, father and mother. We hope that you are by now both fully recovered. Patricia had a suspicion of one coming on two days ago and sensibly went to bed where she is now – the victor of the bout. I had a nip of flu last week-end which was quickly and drastically knocked out by sulfa. The bad season is on us – weeks of accumulated living indoors and no sunshine. When there is a glimpse of sun occasionally at noon, Patricia and I take a quick walk into the little park across the square along the foot of the Kremlin walls.

Today is election day. We suspect that it is going to be another landslide for you know who. Everybody votes. They are handled two ballots on which are printed the names and biographies of the two candidates to the two Soviets. They can't mark anything on the ballots, to do so is to invalidate them. Then they drop the ballots in either or both of two urns. The two urns apparently give one a choice. Last time I understand it was only one urn. Not as democratic as two urns, obviously.

We still haven't heard whether we are going to be allowed to go on our vacation trip. Don't know what is holding it up. If we hear this week, we shall probably get away next week. Patricia's father is due in Greece early in March, so there is still ample time. Patricia needs the change – sun and out of this claustrophobia. Life in the USSR is really quite an extraordinary experience. I don't readily see how Russians stand it. But then, like canaries and goldfish, when you're born to it, it all seems not unnatural.<…>

We have gotten off our first order to Macy's for a perambulator, folding bath, mountains of diapers and a long list of other appliances. Patricia takes it all in her stride but I'm battening down hatches.

Love to you all
John

Letter 10 (April 28, 1946)

Dear family,

We've been home two weeks now and I am still in a stew of activity trying to catch up on back work and keep my head above water with incoming material. The tide is rising because tomorrow our paragon of a Minister Counsellor, George Kennan, is returning to the States for a new assignment and the Ambassador is off to the Paris Peace Conference for several days.

I haven't told you about the last part of our trip, from Naples on. We flew

across the pleasant Italian plains and hills, across the Adriatic to the surly little city of Tirana, capital of Albania. It was back under the iron curtain; we were not allowed to leave the airfield. Then over a range of rugged snow-covered mountains to Sofia – badly damaged by American and British bombing and consequent fires. Sofia and its inhabitants looked worse off than Athens or Naples and the atmosphere was noticeably more that of a police state. Our Representative there has, in addition to a handsome town house a small villa in the country looking out on a great snow-capped mountain. His farm has flower gardens, orchards and fields with grazing sheep – balm in Gilead. After a week's stay in a run-down luxury hotel, we enplaned for Moscow, with stops at Bucharest, Odessa and Kiev.

It was good to get back to our little apartment and our two Volga German jewels.[17] Maria and Hilda flung their arms around Patricia and we settled back into the familiar Moscow regime.

I suppose that Patricia has told you that she went again to see great old bear of a doctor and that he pronounced her to be in excellent condition. She now has her slip of paper permitting her to enter the hospital. This morning she said we have to think of a name for the infant. If it's a girl, it's to be Helen Florence. If a boy, we haven't decided, excepting negatively. Being opposed to dynasties, I won't have him named John Paton Davies III. So it will be decided on a basis of euphony rather than sentiment. Patricia says that she has a name picked out, but won't tell me until I make a choice.

Father and mother, we are glad for your sake that you have gotten off to what you want to do.[18] We only hope that chaos and strife will not impinge too closely on you. The baby things and my birthday presents arrived. Thank you, thank you, thank you. <…>

Love,
John

Letter 11 (May 17, 1946)

Dear family,

I have left Patricia stretched out on the sofa in the apartment reading a detective story to come down here into the office to write a letter. I should have written you last week, but life here has been rather hectic. The new Ambassador[19]

17. Davies means that their service staff (apparently the maid and cook) were representatives of the Volga Germans. The Germans have lived beyond the Volga since the time of Empress Catherine II, i.e. from the second half of the 18th century until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. From 1918 to 1941, the Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans existed as part of the RSFSR. On August 28, 1941, by decree of Stalin, the Volga Germans were deported to remote regions of Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia. At the same time, they were significantly affected in their civil rights. Thus, the work of Volga German women in the American embassy in Moscow is very atypical and could be explained either by significant family ties or cooperation with the NKVD/MGB.

18. In early 1946, John's parents left for China again to resume their missionary activity.

19. Averell Harriman was succeeded by Walter Bedell Smith.

and our superb Minister-Counselor left respectively for the Paris Conference and the USA. The result was that we who remained behind found ourselves carrying a heavy load.

The new Ambassador is quite a man, direct, hard-boiled and quick as a flash. He has us all on our mettle. While he is sizing us up we are all a little tense. His wife is a friendly, motherly person. So we are pleased with our new set-up, because of both of them.

Patricia continues her even way. She is now going to the maternity hospital for check-ups. Her doctor is a little old lady professor who is said by our Russian teacher to be the best obstetrician in the Soviet Union. Patricia is much taken with her for she is apparently quite a personality – the dictator of the hospital before whom male doctors and all of the internes quail. Some of Patricia's stories are most entertaining. Whenever she returns from her weekly visit I stop all other conversation until she tells me what the little doctor had said. Despite her tyrannical attitude toward all of the Russians who work for her and are her patients, she seems to have taken quite a shine to Patricia and has given Patricia her night telephone number with strict injunctions that whenever the baby begins to make its debut Patricia is to call her – which is an extraordinary gesture. Ordinarily the hospital doctors would handle the case. So we now feel that everything is all set. And all we are doing is awaiting the day. Which the professor says is about two weeks off.

The pile of baby clothes is growing. Added to your contribution, mother, are additional supplies from the other grandparents. So we are by now well stocked. The carriage and bath from Macy's should be in any day. We are almost decided on the name if the infant is a boy. Patricia chose it – Mark MacNeill. Only trouble is that I can't remember whether MacNeill is spelled with one or two l's. <…>

Love to you all,

John

Letter 12 (June 14, 1946)

Dear Grandfather, grandmother, grandaunty, uncle and aunty,

I suppose that this letter will be only about the new arrival, whom I haven't even seen yet. Incidentally, I hope you know what I am talking about from the cables I sent yesterday.

Night before last Patricia began to have her first pains at about 11:30. She was up with them all night and thought that they were indigestion from some cocacola she'd had. They were 3 to 5 minutes apart at the outset, not the conventional 20 minutes or so. But I had my doubts. And so did she by 6 a.m. So at 8 I whisked her off to the hospital. The Russians are casual about these things so it took her about an hour and a half to get received. Her clothing, bag, watch, and even her wedding ring were brought out to me by an old nannie, I received them, signed a receipt and left her to the hospital in the same condition it presented Sandra to her. She was taken into a labor room with five nursing women and about ten women in labor. She was the center of course of nurse and doctor attention – all curious

and all abounding with primitive Slavic warmth, and I might add, the nichevo[20] spirit. A cylinder of laughing gas was wheeled over for the pangs. After inhaling without effect and inquiring several times why no effect she observed that the dial indicated the cylinder to be empty. The Russians don't go much for anesthesia, the cylinder was for psychological effect – so she had her pains in the old fashioned way. After several hours with the nursing mothers and the labor ladies, she was whisked off to the delivery room, another collective establishment where with two doctors pressing on her midriff and midwife taking delivery she produced your granddaughter–grandniece–niece at 2 p.m. She said it wasn't bad, but then she is hardy and buoyant type. Characteristic of the atmosphere of the place was the old nannie in the labor room who kept saying to Patricia, "You are having such beautiful pains, such beautiful big pains." Look," to the wailing Russian women, "what beautiful big pains she is having."

This morning by special arrangement with the little dumpling "Professor", who is the autocrat of the hospital and reputedly the best obstetrician in the USSR, I was sneaked in to see Patricia. She has the luxury of a semi-private room which she shares with the wife of a Czech diplomat. She was in excellent spirits, was enjoying the experience and waiting to see the baby, whom she had not seen since the moment after the bottom was slapped, its umbilical cord snipped and it was waved before her eyes; I might add, her astonished eyes. The Russian don't bring the infants back to their mothers until the third day and then swaddled like a Chinese baby with only the eyes, mouth and nose showing. Tomorrow I visit Patricia again and maybe day after tomorrow I shall see my daughter.

Sandra, Patricia and I send our love,

John

Letter 13 (July 13, 1946)

Dear family,

Today being the little Tartar's first month birthday, I am celebrating by writing grandparents, grandaunt and uncle and aunt a letter. We got her birth certificate from Bolshevik authorities the other day. It starts off: "Workers of the World Unite: CITIZEN Sandra Elenya Dzhonovna (that means she's my daughter) Davies." It took me some days to get around to registering her here as an American citizen. The servants kept coming to Patricia in anxious tones and saying, when are you going to get her American documents?" Like the yardmen and charwomen inquiring of our American administrative man with anxiety and perplexity at the time Patricia had just about reached her maximum dimensions, "When is Mrs. Davies going to go back to America to have her baby?" "She isn't going back, she's going to have it here." "But it will be a Soviet citizen!" "Oh no, it will be an American citizen because its parents are American." "Ah then," with nodding heads, "that will be all right."

She follows people with her eyes now. A little falteringly, to be sure, and

20. This word has a multiple meaning – from "nothing" to "easy, easy." In this case it should be interpreted as "no matter."

Hilda the maid is convinced that she takes great interest in the pink and blue rattle-doll that mother sent. It is hung on the side of the crib. She has a voracious appetite and a powerful pair of jaws – to her mother's distress. Patricia nurses her, but it's rather like getting caught in a wringer. So we're sneaking a bottle in on Sandra.

We are in the process of being examined by an Inspector. With the Eastern European boys who are supposed to run this show for the Ambassador having left or about to come, I'm the guy that's holding the bag. Fortunately, the Inspector is a very understanding man and is being very helpful. His probing and delving, however, is just that much more work at a time at which I thought we had long past the back-breaking point.

The Ambassador is pleasant to work with and is getting used to our strange Foreign Service ways. He is a very keen and hard-headed man. I have great respect for his abilities.

Patricia's father sent me a cable a few days ago telling me that I had been promoted to Class IV – compensation, I suppose, for having lost out on the double promotions last year thanks to Choctaw Patrick.[21] Nothing official has come in from Washington yet, so he may have picked up only a rumor. I'll see. I'm pretty fatalistic about the whole thing.<…>

Love to you all,

John

Letter 14 (September 8, 1946)

Dear family,

This is not only happy birthday for Don – and many more of them – but also Tank Day for the Red Army – many less of them. All day it has been tanks. They lined up in front of us at dawn this morning, sat there throughout the day and at 5 p.m. began to roll up through Red Square. I should guess that there were about 500 of them. And now we have had our salute, our rockets, our searchlights and our loud-speaker music. It's all rather tiresome on the heels of Red Army Day, Artillery Day, Navy Day, Air Force Day, V-J Day – all with salutes and pyrotechnic display. Now we shall, I hope, have a little normalcy until November 7 which, oddly enough, is the anniversary of the October Revolution. Something went wrong with the calendars, like Chinese New Year.

The other evening [Sept 4, written by pencil – *K.M.*] we went to a dinner given for a visiting American scientist and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Mudd of Haverford Penn[sylvania]. He teaches micro-biology at U[niversity] of Penn[sylvania].

21. John supposedly refers to general Patrick J. Hurley, his former chef in China.

In his field he is a great man.[22] But in the field of international relations he is perilously close to being a simpleton. Which is true of so many of our visiting firemen. He is so horrified about the atomic Frankenstein he and his fellows have created that he throws the scientific approach overboard in his panicky approach to the problem of maintaining peace with this phenomenal country. It is all like a little upsetting to see this distinguished gentleman making an ass of himself in a field about which he is apparently as ignorant as I am of the fundamentals of micro-biology. But I have strayed far from the dinner. It is at carefully arranged dinners like this that we have our rare chances to meet real Russians – not just servants, Embassy employees and spies. At this meeting Patricia met The Man Who Embalmed Lenin.[23] It is now her favorite after-dinner story. The M-W-E-L was on the strength on that unique achievement made an Academician and granted a great cerise ribbon and gold medal which he proudly wore. In the course of the conversation (Patricia's Russian is now quite good) it developed that M-W-E-L does not seem to be burdened with work, in fact, he seems to be pretty much a man of leisure. Which leads Patricia to conclude he is waiting around between jobs. There are several other entertaining little sidelights which I shall let Patricia tell you when she sees you.

I am glad to report that Sandra-Sasha-Sashinka-Sashulinka[24] has completely recovered from a slight tummy attack and now tips the scales at something over 13 pounds. But I'll leave descriptive details to her proud mother.

John

Letter 15 (September 20, 1946)

Dear family,

It is six thirty in the morning, the charwoman has just woken me up and I am sticking around while she cleans up. It has been my turn to sleep-in in a certain section of our offices. Fortunately it happens only once a month and it means only coming downstairs a few floors from our apartment.

A pouch came in yesterday but no personal mail. So we haven't heard from you all for weeks now.<…>

Sashulinka is now quite a babbler. It's still something of an effort and many

22. Stuart Mudd (1893–1975) was an American physician and professor of microbiology. In 1945, he was appointed the president of the American Society for Microbiology. Prof. Mudd did research on a wide variety of topics, including streptococci, bacterial filtration, and electron microscopy of bacteria. During WW II, he worked out a method for freeze-drying of blood plasma which enabled an effective treatment for blood loss in wounded soldiers.

23. Lenin was first embalmed by Prof. Aleksey I. Abrikosov (1875–1955), who was a Soviet pathologist and a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Patricia's conclusion was quite close to reality: although Abrikosov supervised the autopsies of a number of other major Soviet party leaders, he did not manage to embalm anyone else. Stalin was embalmed by another specialist: apparently, by the time of his death, Abrikosov was already too old for such work.

24. These are Russian pet names for Alexandra.

of the sounds which come out surprise her parents as much as they do herself. <…>

Our friend Dr. Mudd and company have returned to the USA. Men like him make my gorge rise. There is a type of American who comes here, who is taken in by the caviar and champagne treatment bestowed on him both literally and figuratively, and who thereupon sees nothing but good in the USSR and proceeds like a flagellant to belittle the achievements of his own country. And when he returns to the US he emits a flood of untruths about the USSR, has dabs of whitewash on the mighty sepulcher. When we try in conversation with him to correct the distortions, we are prejudiced and unwilling to see any good in the Great Experiment. Fortunately, it seems from a reading of the excerpts we see of the American press, the American people cannot be fooled all of the time. So the Dr. Mudds don't upset me as much as they might.

Love to you all,

John

Letter 16 (September 28, 1946)

Dear family,

A stack of letters came in from all of you in the last pouch. So now we are all caught up on the news. <…> You ask, father, how we decided on the name Sandra. <…> Somehow we struck on Sandra as the first name, just because we, or perhaps I, liked its sound. Fortunately it is also a Russian name, diminutive of Alexandra.<…>

Big Lena calls Sandra, because of her cooing and gurgling, Lasinka (emphasis on the La) which is a diminutive of a diminutive for a nightingale or swallow or simply a peasant term of endearment. The word isn't in the dictionary. The nearest thing to it which we could find in the dictionary was – to our horror – a weasel. Big Lena (this is the last story for this letter) told Patricia the other day, "You know, Lasinka is like a diplomat – she talks and talks and never says anything." Time to stop.

John

Letter 17 (October 11, 1946)

Dear family,

Some day I am going to get so well organized that I shall start writing my letters two or three days before the pouch closes rather than two or three hours before the time. <…>

Last night the Chinese Embassy threw a big celebration in honor of the Double Tenth[25]. It was typical diplomatic national day brawl in Moscow. The dreary diplomatic corps – every face so well known – the regular team of Foreign Service officials permitted to mingle with foreigners at official shows

25. Double Tenth (after October 10) is the National Day of the Republic of China, now held annually as National Day in Taiwan.

and a miscellaneous collection of timid intellectuals in their shine serge suits and evening dresses made out of lampshades or silk drapes "liberated" from German families carefully selected for having the worst taste in Central Europe. Everyone mills uncomfortably around and then makes an off tackle rush for the buffet tables. The practiced Muscovite places himself solidly against the edge of the table so as to avoid being jostled aside by others eager to get at the smoked salmon. Then he begins loading his plate with caviar, herring, cucumbers, sour cream, ham, chicken, pasty potato salad, black bread, white bread and pours himself a goblet of sticky sweet or flattish Caucasian wine. Thus supplied, he proceeds to devour his victuals at the board, feet spread apart to brace himself against the clawing onslaught of others seeking a snack. I have pretty much given up the thought of eating at such occasions. I have dinner before and then stand indolently about watching the agonized proceedings. <…>

Old Sash, as Patricia and I sometimes call her, is now an exceptionally pretty pink and white baby. That's not just my opinion, which is definitely prejudiced, but that of everyone. I only hope that she stays that way and that her paternal characteristics are completely recessive.

Love,
John

Letter 18 (November 4, 1946)

Dear family,

Rush, rush, rush. It's that all day. And now it's rush to get a letter off to you in today's pouch which has technically already closed. Every once and a while I think wistfully of going to a nice sleepy little consulate in a banana republic and being a beachcombing consul, waiting once a month for the trading ship to come into port. But then I'd probably rush to get a last minute letter onto that.

We're in for a hard winter. Not us personally. Because all of Russia could starve before the Kremlin would let it appear to foreigners that things were tough. I don't know why there should have to be such acute privation here more than a year after the war. I can understand why it might be so in devastated areas. But not in Moscow and the untouched part of the country. Much of the suffering is man-made or man-permitted. On Patricia's, Sandra's and my ration cards and with what we get out of our Embassy commissary we figure that we are feeding wholly or partly about seven or eight people. Poor little Hilda, the maid, has three small children and a drunken, no-good veteran husband.<…>

Last evening Patricia and I began speculating on our trip home and our vacation. We shall try to come through the Mediterranean because the North Atlantic in March will be grim. Then vacation. And after that consultation at the Department. Because we so miss sunshine (none for weeks) we are thinking of trying to spend the first month of vacation perhaps in Southern California with anyone who will visit us and then move to Detroit with the sun for May. Of course this, like all of our plans, will probably be revised.

Love to you all,
John

Letter 19 (December 29, 1946)

Dear family,

Just about this time a week ago we arrived back from our week's visit to Stockholm. The Swedish plane took us in American-style to Helsinki where the Soviet plane was grounded. So after a good deal of argument, which convinced us that we were once more behind the curtain, and inefficiency, which confirmed the same, we got places on the train to Leningrad, where Intourist[26] lost one of our bags, and so home to a fatter Sashulia.

The stay in Stockholm was hectic because I was seeing a dentist and Patricia an oculist and in between times we were shopping for ourselves and, it seemed, everyone else in Moscow. So it was no relaxation. But it was a change. A change to a clean, kept up city, to crowds which were well-dressed, well-fed and placid. To hotels with clean linen, good service – and wonderful food: oranges, fresh milk, lettuce. We reveled in it all. And the masses of things to buy. We kept exclaiming how unbelieving any Russian would be to find himself in the big Stockholm Department store surrounded by stacks of things to buy.<…>

Don, thank you for the letter passing on your conversation with John Carter. I have written him and told him that I am not interested in returning during the next year or two to the old field, not for reasons of personalities but simply because I have a bad taste in my mouth. I think that I can manage some sort of a deal by the time I return home – after the Foreign Ministers' Conference here. The Ambassador wants me to stay on for that. I am definitely not interested in the other American republics, being too old to learn Spanish. <…>

As you see, we shan't be home before May and perhaps not June. So instead of a winter resort together it will be a summer resort.<…>

See you all then,

John

Letter 20 (January 16, 1947)

Dear family,

We are recovering from the excitement of Field Marshal Montgomery's visit – not that we got into it excepting for one evening. But the general impact was somewhat more than ordinary. The one evening we were caught up into the whirl was particularly distinguished by the role which Patricia played in it. The Ambassador gave a dinner for the F[ield] M[arshal] at which were present a fair number of dignitaries – and us. As there was no wife of suitable rank in the Embassy fluent in Russian, Patricia was placed next to Marshal Konev, the ranking Soviet guest. She was in that position pressed into service as an interpreter between the Marshal, and Montgomery, and the Ambassador and Mrs Smith, on whose left the Marshal sat. The situation was not without its humor – war reminiscences by the warriors of the three Great Allies interpreted with Patricia's

26. Intourist (short for "International tourist") was a Soviet state agency responsible for all foreign visits.

lisping maternity Russian. The high point was, of course, the Ambassador's toast to the heroes of Alamein and Stalingrad (a slight historical inaccuracy) which Patricia translated in a whisper to Konev. She had a hard time with the Russian word for machine gun, the idea of which she got across by pointing a finger at the Marshal's corpulent midgriff and making a brrrrring noise. Old Konev seemed to enjoy the whole situation and drank innumerable toasts to that well known Muscovite character – Sashulinka. <…>

We are awaiting the arrival of the new Secretary in March with great interest. It promises to be a hectic show. And an interesting one. Worth staying over for.

We send all our love to you – and an especially big hug from Sandra Helen to grandfather and grandmother.

John

Letter 21 (January 29, 1947)

Dear family,

This is written with Old Sash sitting on my lap so if you see any strange letters popping up you will xj f – oops – know who is responsible for my bad typing. <…>

Our very nice Counselor has gone home on consultation leaving me carrying his and my loads. So I am more busy than my usual busy. I usually take work home in the evening, so poor Patricia is regularly confronted of an evening with the typical comic strip harassed husband with nose buried in papers ignoring her attempts to be amiable. She also finds that come 10:30 at parties, the old man is signaling her that it's time to go home – even though no other guests will be leaving until after midnight. Fortunately, Mama has now discovered that she too is a somnolent type; so I am usually able to get her away without much difficulty.

We were glad to hear about Don's venture into radio and the progress you have made in it. Do tell us how it progresses. Don't, however, try to get an assignment as a commentator at Moscow! At present the Russians are not letting any foreigners broadcast, but if in future they do it will be a baffling and frustrating business as Dick Hottelet[27] could tell you. <…>

Love to all of you from all of us.

Letter 22 (February 12, 1947)

Dear family,

<…> Patricia is off in Minsk with Drew Middleton's wife[28] visiting the UNRRA Mission and seeing ravaged Belorussia. It's a pretty grim place, so I imagine that her aesthetic senses are not being gratified. She should be back at the end of this week.

27. Richard Curt Hottelet (1917–2014) was an American broadcast journalist for the latter half of the XXth century. He was one of the "Murrow Boys," a WWII-era team of war correspondents recruited by Edward Murrow at CBS.

28. Drew Middleton (1913–1990) was a *New York Times* correspondent covering the WWII and Eastern Europe events. Later he became a producer for several documentaries.

My old buddie with whom I entered the Service, Foy Kohler, has arrived with wife and cat. (With Sashinka on my knee I am glad I have no cat). <…> Foy will take over my job between now and the time I leave. He is good to have here, he is so solid and sensible.

The press has asked for seventy something correspondents to come here from the US for the conference. The Ruskies[29] have said they will take 20. Which raises the fundamental question – is Moscow a place in which international conferences can be held. The answer might seem to be no. What really scares the Soviet authorities is the swarm of newshawks poking around and when they get home writing, not about the conference, but about what exists behind the iron curtain. Even 20 can do a lot of damage.

<…> Where do you plan to settle when you return? We want to hear all about your plans.

Love,
John

Letter 23 (March 7, 1947)

Dear family,

<…> The conference of Foreign Ministers has begun to roll in on us. The first wave has hit the Moscow beach and eight planes are due today. The pandemonium is already awesome to behold. I refuse to think of the future. With the arrival of Foy, I am unloading as rapidly as possible onto him. Thus I hope that during the conference I shall have time to devote to clearing up tag ends and getting ready to leave. We still do not know of course, when we shall be leaving. I should guess anytime after April 15. Patricia's daddy had reserved us a cabin on one of the President Lines freighters from Genoa, so we could have a trip through the Mediterranean and south Atlantic. But we think we presser a big ship with stewardesses and a doctor in case Sashy gets an upset. So we are thinking of a North Atlantic liner. It's all typically vague. So you'll see us when you see us.

It now seems that after our leave, I may be detailed temporarily to the Dept until the National War College opens in October. And then I may be one of the Foreign Service men assigned to the 3 months course at the college. So there is a possibility that I shall be in Washington until December.[30] It's not certain, of course, for nothing is in this racket. <…>

Love,
John

Letter 24 (March 28, 1947)

Dear family,

The conference proceeds, yet is not very much a part of our lives. I go to

29. The Russians.

30. It is known that upon returning to the United States John Davies got a position in the Planning Board of the Department of State.

meetings once in a while – and nearly pass out from boredom. On my last visit I got smart and took a copy of Newsweek with me which helped out. The delegation is self-contained, has its own full staff and works in its won offices at the Hotel Moskva and at Spaso House. So during office hours we continue the even tenor of our bureaucratic ways. Out of office hours we congregate over luncheon or dinner tables to swap gossip. The press, of course, is all over the place – as is the custom of the press. We have quite fallen for Dot Avery's husband, Flossie. We have had him up for drinks, for lunch and yesterday we went to the hotel for lunch with him. He is such a nice solid intelligent citizen.

An entertaining little incident occurred the other day, the anniversary of Greek independence. The silly little Greek Ambassador invited all of the diplomatic corps and delegates to a formal evening reception. Curiously enough, shortly after the invitations were issued, Molotov invited the three visiting Ministers, the delegations and the heads of all diplomatic missions to a gala performance of Romeo and Juliet. Had usual habits been followed, this would have torpedoed the Greek reception. We handled the impasse, as you have doubtless red in the press, by most of our staff declining the ballet and going to the Greeks. The Secretary, his entourage and a few of our staff went, however, to both. Patricia and I were in the latter category. The ballet was new to Patricia and me, first time we had seen it. It is primarily a spectacle, the ballet is only incidental. It represents the peak in a development of successively more stupendous and garish pageants. It's a curious thing about Soviet aesthetics – at one moment Soviet art is supremely good taste, and at the next (a far longer moment) is extravagant vulgarity. <…>

We have cabled the Embassy at London asking for a sailing from a Channel port early in May. We haven't heard yet. I imagine that the Embassy will have some difficulty as passages are supposed to be booked for months in advance. We plan to leave here on the 15th of April and look around Paris and London a bit before moving on. As we may stay in Washington at least until December, we have made a bid for Mrs Durbrow's apartment – she is coming here with two small children to join her husband.[31] We haven't yet heard from her. If you know of anything, Don, cable us.

Love,
John

Conclusion:

The letters you have just finished reading take us deep into the private life of the family of an American diplomat who found himself in one of the most closed and difficult places in the post-war world. Ella Winter's book mentioned in the

31. Elbridge Durbrow (1903–1997) – was a US Foreign Service officer and diplomat who served as the Counselor of Embassy and Deputy Chief of Mission in Moscow in the late 1940s succeeding George Kennan. In 1944, he was appointed as the chief of the Eastern European Division of the State Department, promoted from his former position of the assistant chief of this unit. Throughout the 1940s, Durbrow was a proponent of more tight approach to the relations with the Soviet Union.

introduction tells us how difficult it was for an American journalist to adjust to her life in Moscow – despite the fact that she could move more freely around the city, visit shops and markets, and interact with a wider range of people from different social groups. Here we are presented with a scrupulously reconstructed life of the "elite." By American standards of the time, Davies' life was full of hardship: the lack of such common household items as socks or curtains, the inability to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, etc. is described with great humor. But in the eyes of the Soviet people, Davies' life was, however, incredibly comfortable and prosperous: a large apartment, servants, access to goods from the embassy shop and, finally, the possibility of receiving parcels from abroad and ordering from American stores must have been seen by an average person as something beyond reality. An unconscious comparison of the two worlds provided by Davies illustrates well the difference between life and perceptions of life in the post-war USSR and the United States. It adds another small piece to the incredibly complex puzzle of the Cold War origins that scholars around the world are still piecing together.

About the author:
Having graduated from St Petersburg State University, Russia, **Kristina Minkova** is currently a Doctor of Science in History (Habitation) and Associate Professor at the Department of American Studies of her Alma Mater. She has been engaged in exploring the economic roots of the Cold War. Her other research interests include International Trade, Canadian Studies and Expansion of Orthodoxy in North America.

Book Reviews

Sergei I. Zhuk, *KGB Operations against the USA and Canada in Soviet Ukraine, 1953-1991*. New York: Routledge, 2022, xxii, 260pp. $180, cloth.

Sergei Zhuk, a professor of History at Ball State University in Indiana, is the author of previous books concerning Ukraine, including *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City* (2010). His new study builds upon his earlier work concerning youth culture, religion, and Soviet experts on America.

Drawing on extensive research in KGB files in the archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) in Kyiv, as well as several interviews with retired KGB officers, Zhuk presents many interesting findings. For example, he describes how the KGB refusal to let former political prisoners return to western Ukraine led many to settle in eastern Ukraine, with more than a thousand in Zhuk's hometown of Dnipropetrovsk. (Thus, the KGB may have unintentionally helped to spread Ukrainian nationalist influence from western regions to other parts of Ukraine.) Describing Soviet security preparations for President Dwight Eisenhower's anticipated visit to the USSR in 1960, Zhuk reveals that as late as April 23 KGB officers in Kyiv were planning operations against the numerous American journalists who would accompany the president. (That suggests the Soviet leadership remained optimistic about improving relations with the United States until the eve of the U-2 overflight of the USSR on May 1, in contrast to studies that have claimed Nikita Khrushchev had given up hopes for a breakthrough well before the shooting down of the spy plane.) A decade later, Zhuk shows, the KGB took action to prevent Vietnamese student demonstrations in Kyiv when President Richard Nixon visited in 1972. Among many other details, we learn from Zhuk's book that in the early 1980s Ukrainian punks, many of whom were strongly influenced by American music, used Nazi symbols and enthusiastically praised nationalist hero Stepan Bandera, who had collaborated with Nazi Germany.

Unfortunately, Zhuk tends to overstate and oversimplify, particularly in his treatment of Soviet enthusiasm about American culture and consumer products. For example, he writes that after Khrushchev's resignation in 1964 "Western, mostly American, influences … spread throughout the entire Soviet society, affecting all its social groups" (193). Paraphrasing a KGB report, Zhuk adds that consumption of American mass culture "contributed to the 'hostile anti-Soviet attitudes of the Soviet youth'" (193). Missing from Zhuk's very brief Selected Bibliography are studies by scholars such as Susan Reid and Alexei Yurchak that

offer more complex and sophisticated perspectives on Soviet popular responses to American culture and consumer goods. In another case of oversimplification, Zhuk writes that Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the late 1980s "did not change priorities in the KGB treatment of their main adversary – the capitalist America" (242). Zhuk disregards the end of Soviet jamming of US-sponsored radio broadcasts, does not mention the halting of anti-American propaganda in the Soviet press by 1988, and does not include in his bibliography a book on the late Soviet press by Jonathan Becker, who analyzed that shift.

Although Zhuk realized that his archival material about KGB operations against the Ukrainian diaspora in the US after 1945 should be complemented by research in archives in the US, he decided in this book to focus only on KGB operations against America that originated in Ukraine from 1953 to the 1980s. As a result, the 1945-1953 period is neglected and the claims of KGB officers are not checked against records of US intelligence organizations.

Much of Zhuk's book summarizes and quotes the content of material in the KGB/SBU archive, without sufficient critical analysis or contextualization. As Zhuk puts it, his book concentrates "on the sequence of events presented in those documents" (xi). Zhuk's use of material from the KGB archive is often credulous. For example, he writes that the creation of 150 committees against US interference in El Salvador in the early 1980s was a result of KGB operations. That ignores the origins of most of the committees in local American indignation at the human rights abuses of the Salvadoran government and death squads, and it echoes the discredited claims of President Ronald Reagan and his advisers that opponents of their policies were pawns of the KGB. In another case of credulity, Zhuk reproduces a former KGB agent's claim that the KGB used Black Panthers and other African Americans in operations, for example against Ukrainian American demonstrations in Washington in 1984. Zhuk appears to be unaware that the Black Panthers had been active in Washington mainly in the early 1970s, and that they were not a powerful organization by the 1980s. He did not include any of the many studies of the Black Panther Party in his bibliography.

Other scholars who have used the KGB archive in Kyiv, such as Tatiana Vagramenko, have had more critical and sophisticated approaches to analyzing documents there. Zhuk's simpler and more credulous approach leads him to misidentify some individuals and to make some puzzling statements. For example, he writes that the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which European states played a leading role in negotiating, which Washington grudgingly tolerated, and which Leonid Brezhnev eagerly sought, were "perceived as the US' creation and inspiration" (197).

The quality of writing is poor. Many sentences are rough conversions of Russian into English, with awkward structures, inappropriate verb tenses, and missing or inappropriate definite and indefinite articles. Zhuk thanks the editors from Routledge for making his prose "more lucid" (xxii), yet the writing is often clumsy and sometimes opaque.

David S. Foglesong
Rutgers University

Winston James, *Claude McKay: The Making of a Black Bolshevik*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2022, 464 pp. Index. $32, Paper.

James has written a brilliant biography that frames the intellectual development of poet, novelist, and political thinker Claude McKay within a world shaped by the aftermath of slavery, the continued force of colonialism, and the revolutionary upheavals of the early twentieth century.

This framing – and McKay's own travels and perspective – has allowed James to paint a picture of the global political interconnectedness of the era. McKay was shaped by his travels from Jamaica to the U.S. South, New York, and England, and by the influence of the Russian Revolution, well before his travels to the Soviet Union (which took place after the period covered in this first of two planned volumes).

McKay's Jamaican youth exposed him to contradictions. He came from a family of prosperous, land-owning farmers, but he was a dark-skinned man in a society deeply imbued with colorism. McKay's early mentors including his brother, U. Theo, exposed him to various political ideas as well as the English literary cannon, but McKay never neatly fit into the elite literary tradition, nor did he fully adopt any of the political ideas he was exposed to in his youth.

By putting him in close contact with ordinary people, James argues, McKay's unhappy period as a constable played a key role in his intellectual development. McKay's early poetry is imbued with the perspective of workers and peasants, women and men battered by the impoverishment imposed on the bulk of Jamaica's population as the transition from sugar to bananas allowed a few enormous foreign companies to dominate the country's economy.

McKay's experiences of race and colorism in Jamaica were one thing: the utter brutality of U.S. racism was another. James asserts that when he came to the United States, Jim Crow, lynchings, and anti-black riots at first shocked McKay into silence, and then radicalized him. The search for an answer opened McKay to revolutionary politics. This was the same period that McKay learned of the Russian Revolution. He was already open to the idea that working people understood any society at a more fundamental level than its elite and had the capacity to run it. He was taken with the further possibility that the Russian Revolution's fight against antisemitism held a possible answer to the problem of racism in the rest of the world.

In 1919, McKay learned of Black people fighting back in organized fashion against racist mobs in Chicago and Washington, exhibiting the spirit of resistance even in the face of overwhelming odds captured so famously in McKay's poem, "If We Must Die." This, for McKay, was analogous in many ways to the Bolshevik struggle against pogroms. By 1919, then, "socialism was, in McKay's estimation, the most effective and promising vehicle to achieve Black liberation" (260).

While McKay made the very un-Bolshevik choice to go to London to get a book published, the searing experience of British racism in the seat of empire, his close work with Sylvia Pankhurst on *The Workers Dreadnought,* and his engagement with Marxist classics led McKay to formulate a more fundamental

connection between the struggle for socialism and Black liberation. He came to argue that anti-colonial revolutions throughout the world were unlikely to stop by putting the colonial bourgeoisies in power, because workers and peasants in the colonies would not "'tamely submit' to a new capitalist order in place of the old one" (311). Rather, the anticolonial revolutions would be key parts of the world proletariat revolution, even in places where the working class was small. James notes that McKay here independently arrived at Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. Two conclusions flowed from this: socialists should support movements like Garveyism and the fights for independence in Ireland, India, and Africa because they struck at the single greatest obstacle to socialist revolution: the British empire. And, even after McKay had experienced the ignorance, racism, and violence of British workers, he still argued that Garvey and other fighters for Black and colonial liberation should "be more interested in the white radical movements" (310), because they were each fighting the same enemy.

It was in this light that McKay insisted on the importance of the fight against racism within the labor movement, shown by James through McKay's critique of E. D. Morel's "Black Horror on the Rhine." Morel's attack on the French occupation of the German Rhineland hinged on the accusation that Black colonial troops were raping French women – even though there was no evidence this had happened. McKay pointed out that this accusation played on the central trope used by lynch mobs and could only further enflame British workers against all those from the colonies deposited on their shores by the World War. Considering the continued popularity of Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost,* which lionizes Morel as a fighter against Belgian brutality in Congo, this is an important corrective on the limits of British Labour Party politics.

In the end, James' shows McKay as more than an artist reacting against the brutality and injustice of his society, but as a deeply politically engaged thinker, inspired by the possibility that the oppressed around the world might find the way to organize themselves and overthrow their oppressors.

Sam Mitrani
College of DuPage

Alexei Evstaf'ev, edited by Susan Smith-Peter. The Great Republic Tested by the Touch of Truth. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica, 2022. – xxii, 71 p.

I had been awaiting the publication of this manuscript for many years, ever since I first encountered it in the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Library. Alexei Evstaf'ev, the Russian consul in Boston and New York during the first half of the 19th century, provided a caustic yet well-informed critique of American democracy in his book. In many respects, his insights foreshadowed the ideological battles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Susan Smith-Peter has done an excellent job in preparing the text for publication and providing a detailed biographical sketch of the Russian diplomat

in her well-researched introductory article. In her text, Smith-Peter focuses on Evstaf'ev's close ties to American Federalists and contrasts his work with Alexis de Tocqueville's famous *Democracy in America*, penned two decades earlier. Indeed, Evstaf'ev's admiration for the British political system and his distrust of democracy aligned him with many Federalist thinkers, a party that dissolved shortly after 1815. His preference for aristocracy also reveals his agreement with his French noble predecessor. Evstaf'ev, however, himself referred to his famous forerunner as "the Utopian Tocquevilles of the day" who deceived himself and his readers with "false estimates" (p.8), contrasting his own more informed and well-founded judgments.

However, I would place this text within the context of the immediate political struggles of the years just before Evstaf'ev completed it, particularly within the international arena rather than solely within the domestic U.S. context. Indeed, he concluded the "Advertisement" (preface) to the book by directly referencing these circumstances: "Hungarian war, Lamartine's supremacy in France," and "the advent of Kossuth to the United States" (p.4). In other words, Evstaf'ev reacted to the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848-49 and the emergence of new ideas about America's world mission in response.

The "Spring of Nations" revealed the popularity of the American model among European revolutionaries, with republican ideas spreading across the Old World and the Hungarian call for independence shaking the Austrian Empire. Many democratic and nationalist European revolutionaries viewed the U.S. as a model for their constitutional projects. Consequently, a new generation of American politicians dreamt of revolutionizing the international order to position the model democratic republic as the leading state rather than a mere survivor within the existing world system based on legitimism and monarchical rule. As Russia was the main guarantor of the Vienna system of international relations, created after the Napoleonic wars, it could not escape becoming a major target. The Russian intervention into the Hungarian rebellion sparked an outburst of anti-Russian sentiment on the part of the American public. The *New York Herald* described the events in Europe as a great struggle between "the liberal cause, and Russia leading the despots." In the event that Russian despotism were to win, the article went on, it would "immediately turn towards America, to punish us, the instigators, the first to lift up before the world the standard of republicanism."[1] The early aftermath of the European revolutions of 1848–1849 provided the first opportunity for Americans to amend their self-identification to reflect the new importance of their republican model for the Old World. This seemed to call for radical change to Russia's image in American political debates and journalists' depictions, especially those of journalists agitated by exiled Hungarian leader Kossuth's tour of the United States in 1851–1852.

It was this brief but intense surge in anti-Russian sentiment among Americans that compelled the senior Russian Consul General in New York, Alexei Evstaf'ev (who had proved himself an efficient propagandist forty years earlier during the

1. · Cit.: Eugene Anschel, comp. *The American Image of Russia, 1775-1917*. 107.

War of 1812), to write a monograph criticizing the U.S. political system. Evstaf'ev completed his book in May 1852, skillfully summarizing the official Russian view of American democracy, which was shared by many Russian elites.

Evstaf'ev presented a comparison between "one of the extremes, the popular American Republic," and "its antipodal Russian Despotism." The Russian diplomat addressed the main question of his time: "whether monarchies combine against republics, or republics are sworn to destroy all monarchies." He pounced on the United States and on Americans, criticizing the attitude that would later become known as American exceptionalism, and was especially indignant about the American belief "that nothing anti-republican has any value, that no good, physical or moral, can spring from the soil of monarchy," reminding Americans of the irony of "their own doctrine that, in all respect, a negro slave is better off, much better, than the negro in a state of freedom!!"(p.6).

Evstaf'ef's aim appears twofold: to disavow the American example and to cast doubt on the bipolar vision of the international arena. Hence, he emphasized that England presented the happy middle ground between the extremes of Russian despotism and American democracy.

Evstaf'ev divided the main part of his essay into nine sections, arguing that "the great Republic is rich in illusions. Her gifts, worth having, are already enjoyed in the Christian civilized communities. Her constitution is radically defective. Her frame lacks real strength. Her basis lacks adequate solidity. Her boasted federative might is her adherent weakness. Her existence is contrary to the laws of Nature. The social principles on which she leans are false. She, as a whole, is but a plausible imposture" (p.9-10). The author developed each thesis with different types of arguments, and not all of them seem obsolete. Thus, when Evstaf'ev argued that the U.S. federal system was weak, and "[i]ts heavy and inert components [we]re so heterogeneous, that the first slight shock may cause disruption" (p.41), he certainly predicted what would happen a decade later with the secession and Civil War.

In some parts, Evstaf'ev's criticism of the United States appears very contemporary to us, despite his archaic language. When he blamed America for "sowing where she can the Dragon-teeth of Revolution" (p.5), one can easily recall Putin's propaganda in the aftermath of the "color revolutions" of the early 2000s or the Arab spring a decade later. When the Russian diplomat wrote that Americans were "so prodigal of censure toward others, and so sensitive to it themselves," that they were "judging of men and things by their own standard and proscribing all that in their estimation falls below it" (p.6), it resonated with claims made by many critics of U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

This essay, written in a field that we would now call comparative politics, was a new phenomenon. It reflected the fact that both American and Russian societies perceived approaching crises; its content also foreshadowed the bipolar vision of the world. For a while, it appeared as an antiquarian relic of a long-gone era. However, now, after the "end of history" has also ended we may reread old criticisms with renewed interest."

Ivan Kurilla
Wellesley College

Gregory J. Wallance, *Into Siberia: George Kennan's Epic Journey Through the Brutal, Frozen Heart of Russia*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2023., xvii, 284pp. Index. $30.00, cloth.

Writer and lawyer Gregory J. Wallance has written an engaging new account of the travels of American explorer of Siberia, George Kennan, in his new book *Into Siberia: George Kennan's Epic Journey Through the Brutal, Frozen Heart of Russia*. Kennan was a distant cousin of the twentieth-century diplomat of the same name (George Frost Kennan) known for originating the containment policy for the United States with the Soviet Union after World War II. The George Kennan of the nineteenth century was famous for his explorations of Siberia in the 1860s and the 1880s that revealed to the outside world the history and culture of Siberia, most notably the exile system.

Kennan first traveled in Siberia in the 1860s when he was a very young man hired to be part of a crew that installed telegraph systems in some of the remotest and most isolated parts of the world. The Russian-American Telegraph Expedition took Kennan across some of the most frigid parts of Siberia exposing the young man to the Russian language, local customs, and the exile system. Upon his return, he defended the exile system as a humane system and wrote about his travels magazines like *Putnam's Magazine* and the *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*. Eventually, he would write books of his own travels from both trips to Siberia. These articles and books became some of the most influential impressions of Russians for Americans and other Western audiences.

Wallance's book focuses mainly on the second journey to Siberia in the 1880s when he was accompanied by the artist, George A. Frost. Kennan took many photographs on their journey while Frost sketched and painted scenes as they traveled through south-central Siberia. Many of Frost's sketches were published with Kennan's written work in *The Century Magazine* and his books, like *Siberia and the Exile System* (1891). Kennan and Frost explored such cities as Tomsk, Omsk, Irkutsk, Chita, and others. The path out to Siberia ended in the gold mines of Kara. Kennan's view of the exile system became more critical after the second trip. This negative assessment inspired American critics of the exile system.

Wallance's book relies heavily on Kennan's published and manuscript writings concerning the trip in the 1880s. The author takes the reader through Kennan's journey across Russia starting in St. Petersburg, ending in Kara, and then back again. The arduous trip left both American travelers excited by what they had seen, exhausted by the difficulties of the journey, and psychologically comprised (at least temporarily). A sustaining part of the journey for both men were numerous, yet only occasional, letters from their families.

Wallance's account is a compelling story of adventure as he leads the reader from place-to-place giving details on what the pair encountered. Yet, the account does not give much to the reader that those interested in Kennan and his writings did not already know. Wallance researched the account thoroughly using Kennan's published works as well as manuscripts and letters held at the Library of Congress. For a general audience, this work would be a fine introduction to

Kennan's adventures. For specialists, there are other works by Frederick F. Travis and Susan Smith-Peter that offer more analysis, context, and commentary on the nature of Russian-American relations.

Wallance's work is a welcome addition to the literature on the history of Russian-American relations. Kennan's adventures are a critical part of the history of Russian-American relations and Wallance's account helps illustrate this importance for a contemporary audience interested in learning more about Kennan, Siberia, and the era.

William B. Whisenhunt
Emeritus, College of DuPage

Field Notes

1. Edward Kasinec, "An American Philanthropist in Istanbul, 1920-1929: Anna Van Schaick Mitchell's Albums, Photographs and Papers at the Hoover Institution Archives and Library". *Slavic & Eat European Information Resources*, vol. 24, issue 4, 2023. The article introduces hitherto untapped visual resources (photographs, presentation albums, and scrapbook) on post-World War I Russian refugees in Istanbul that belong to the Anna Mitchell Papers, which were gifted to the Hoover Institution Library and Archives at Stanford University in 1967. Link to the article: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15228886.2024.2330809?src=

2. Special issue of *Slavic & East European Information Resources, Volume 24, Issue 2-3 (2023)*: 105-231.

It's on Great Collectors of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Research Materials across North America

https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wsee20/24/2-3

3. A Blue Brick : Festschrift in Honour of John E. Bowlt was published in Frankfurt-am Main: Esterum Publishing, 2023

John E. Bowlt - Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Director of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture at the University of Southern California.

The 2016 Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award, which honors senior scholars who have helped to build and develop the field through scholarship, training, and service to the profession, is presented to **John E. Bowlt**, Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Director of the Institute of Modern Russian Culture at the University of Southern California.

Here is more information about him: https://aseees.org/citation/john-e-bowlt-2016/

4. Call for Proposals - *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*)! https://journals.ku.edu/jras

The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) is planning to publish an anniversary issue dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Russian-American relations focusing on the year 1945. This year, of course,

marks the end of World War II / Great Patriotic War. We are inviting scholars to contribute articles to be included in this anniversary issue that will be published in Summer 2025. The specific theme of the article is up to the author, but it needs to focus on Russian-American relations in the year 1945 - (both broadly speaking). The deadline for submitting proposals/abstracts is July 1, 2024. In this part of the process, please submit a proposal or abstract of 100 words that describes your article. In addition, please submit a c.v. Both of these documents should be in Word or PDF form and as attachments to the following email address: jras1807@gmail.com

By the end of July, 2024, those selected to be in the volume will be notified by email. The final article will be due in a Word or PDF document to the same email address by February 1, 2025. Publication date is Summer 2025.

The *Journal of Russian American Studies* (*JRAS*) is an open access peer-reviewed journal focused on the history of Russian-American studies from the 18th to the 21st centuries. Its aim is to be a forum for the latest scholarship regarding the history of the intricate relationship between Russia (broadly defined) and the United States. The journal welcomes submissions and publishes articles and book reviews in English and Russian. https://journals.ku.edu/jras

Sincerely,
Ben Whisenhunt
Lee Farrow
Co-Managing Editors
Journal of Russian American Studies (*JRAS*)
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5. In October and November, 2024, the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES) will hold its National Convention online and in Boston. Below are some sessions, among others we do not know about yet, that will be at the conference.

Session 1: The Soviet Union as an Object of the U.S. Cold War Mission: Real Politics and Imaginary Reality

Chair: Vladislav Zubok, London School of Economics and Political Science UK

The US Businessmen in the USSR: Lessons of American Capitalism for Soviet Economic Reforms
Igor Tarbeev, Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Sciences;

Liberalism versus Communism: The Soviet Other in Representations of American Cartoonists
Victoria Zhuravleva.

The Soviet Leaders as the 'Dark Twins' of the US Presidents in the Cold War Discourse of American Popular Music
Aleksandr Okun

Discussant: Dina Fainberg, City University of London
Discussant: Mark Kramer, Harvard U

Session 2: Americans in Revolutionary Russia: Three Visions of Freedom and Liberation

Chair: Lyubov Ginzburg, Independent Scholar

Power and Potential: Richard Washburn Child's Assessment of Russia, 1916
Lee Farrow, Auburn U at Montgomery

From the Winter Palace to Lubianka: Paul B. Anderson in Petrograd and Moscow, 1917-1918
Matt Miller, U of Northwestern-St. Paul

The Liberation of Albert Rhys Williams: 1918 and the Trip Home
William Whisenhunt, College of DuPage

Discussant: Michael Paulauskas, Middle Tennessee State U

Session 3: Echoes of the American Civil War in Russia: Then and Now

Chair: William Whisenhunt, College of DuPage

Roundtable Member: Don Doyle, University of South Carolina

Roundtable Member: Milla (Lioudmila) Fedorova, Georgetown U

Roundtable Member: Ivan Kurilla, European U at St. Petersburg (Russia)

Roundtable Member: Victoria Zhuravleva,