

## ARTHUR BENOIT EKLOF

Arthur Benoit (Ben) Eklof, a leading American specialist in the history of Imperial and Soviet Russian education, retired in 2019 after 42 years on the faculty of the Department of History. Eklof continues to serve as director of the IU Institute for the Study of Russian Education and as senior researcher at the Higher School of Economics, Poletaev Institute of Historical and Historiographical Studies in the Humanities, Moscow.

Eklof received a B.A. from Middlebury College in 1968 and a Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1977. Growing up in a family steeped in classical music and literature, he was drawn early on to Russian culture, especially Rachmaninoff and Dostoevsky. His lifelong engagement with Russian history developed during his years at Princeton. He became acquainted with the Soviet Union firsthand as a Fulbright and IREX scholar at Moscow State University in 1972–73 and, unusual for that time, stayed on for two more years as a translator at Progress Publishers, a leading Soviet press. From this unprecedented three-year immersion in Soviet life, Eklof gained a rich and nuanced understanding of the culture and a love of the language. He became convinced that the prevailing Western Cold War image of Soviet society was way off base. Indeed, he saw that despite the everyday hardships and shortages of daily life, Russian citizens lived normal lives and that most were neither dissidents nor true believers.

Subsequently, these early insights were enhanced by regular, extended research trips to Russia. During the late Soviet era he had an up-close view of perestroika, especially relating to changes in Russian education, as a consultant to Edward Dneprov, who became the first post-Soviet minister of education. His friendship and collaboration with Dneprov continue to the present.

During his career at Indiana University, Eklof compiled a distinguished publication record. Books authored by him include the classic *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture and Peasant Pedagogy 1861–1914* (Berkeley,

1986); *Soviet Briefing: Gorbachev and the Reform Process (1985–1988)* (Boulder, 1989); *Druzhba. Sem'ia, revoliutsiia. Nikolai Charushkin i pokolenie narodnikov v Rossii (1870–1930)* (Moscow, 2016), co-authored with Tatiana Saburova; and *A Generation of Revolutionaries: Nikolai Charushkin and Populism in Russia from the Great Reforms to Perestroika* (Bloomington, 2017), also co-authored with Tatiana Saburova. Major scholarly collections he has edited or co-edited include *The World of the Russian Peasant: Post-Emancipation Culture and Society* (Boston, 1990); *Russia's Great Reforms, 1855–1881* (Moscow, 1992; Bloomington, 1994); *Democracy in the Russian School: The Reform Movement in Education Since 1984* (Boulder, 1993); *A Social History of Imperial Russia* (Boulder, 2000); and *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia: Legacies and Prospects* (New York, 2005).

Ben Eklof's writings have been widely reviewed and highly praised. Alfred J. Rieber, a dean of American historians of modern Russian politics and society, praised *Russian Peasant Schools* as “the definitive history of literacy and schooling among the vast majority of the Russian population between the emancipation and the outbreak of World War I” (*History of Russian Education Quarterly*). Christine D. Worobec, a distinguished social historian of modern Russia, lauded the book as “a major contribution to Russian social history and to the burgeoning interest in the Russian peasantry” (*The Journal of Modern History*). Historian Max Okenfus characterized Eklof's study as “the fullest and most carefully researched attempt to document the spread of literacy in late imperial Russia. . . an original and important book” (*Russian Review*).

*A Generation of Revolutionaries* has been received with similar enthusiasm. Sarah Badcock, a British historian of revolutionary Russia, wrote that “Eklof and Saburova's multi-faceted treatment of Charushin and his milieu offer up a rich picture of the 1870's Populist movement, of their life and work in prison and

Siberian exile, and the vibrant civil society that emerged in late imperial Russia,” adding that the book “is a good read in its own right . . . and an invaluable addition to undergraduate and graduate curricula” (*The Journal of Modern History*). Agrarian historian David Darrow described the book as “a powerful piece of scholarship that will stand for a long time. It . . . demonstrates how biography can open doors to so much more than the life of a single individual.”

Eklof's research, writing, and teaching have been supported by three Fulbright Fellowships, two research fellowships from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), and a Midwest Consortium (MUCIA)–Moscow State University Grant (MGU). In 1987–88 he was a senior fellow at the Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., and in 2009 he was awarded a Department of History annual award for teaching excellence.

Eklof has an ambitious program of research and writing going forward, including finishing two book-length projects, *The Pedagogy of Cooperation in Russia: Edward Dneprov and the Politics of Educational Reform in the Perestroika Era and Beyond* and *A Distinctive Russian Culture of Schooling: Everyday Life and Practices, 1870–1914*. Eklof's longer-range planning, together with his collaborator Tatiana Saburova, involves a major archive-based research and writing project focused on the zemstvos, important institutions of provincial local government in late Imperial Russia.

Beyond the academic, throughout his life Eklof has been attached to the outdoors. Besides Russia, he is devoted to his summer home in Maine. For many years he was a serious, competitive distance runner. More recently, from his scenic home in the woods outside Bloomington he has turned to daily distance cycling with like-minded friends.

*Alexander Rabinowitch*