

## Larry E. Holmes

Larry E. Holmes (1942–2022), professor emeritus at the University of South Alabama, a leading expert on Stalinism and Soviet education, a staggeringly prolific scholar of a dozen books and nearly a hundred articles and encyclopedia entries, and a pioneer in regional studies passed away in November 2022 in Kirov, Russia. Larry died in the city that he loved. He was one of the few historians who was as much a part of the Russian scholarly community as he was the western community.

Larry was born in Chicago and raised in Kansas. An outstanding college pitcher at McPherson College, he considered pursuing a professional career, but instead enrolled in graduate studies in history, first at Eastern New Mexico University for his MA, and then at the University of Kansas for his PhD. Two noted Russian historians on staff—the medievalist Oswald P. Backus and Soviet historian Herbert Ellison—helped him to decide to focus on Russian history. He produced a dissertation on Soviet historical studies of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and accepted a position at the University of Southern Alabama in Mobile in 1968, not knowing what to expect.

Larry remained on the faculty at the University of South Alabama for thirty-eight years, where he became an award-winning teacher and scholar, beloved by students and colleagues. Remembered fondly as a kind mentor to his students, Larry also led the faculty as President of Faculty Senate in 1977–78 and 1991–92. He remained passionate about baseball and played on a semi-pro team in Mobile. He later became a competitive marathon runner and led a running group at USA. In 1972, the university tried to deny him tenure for his political activity, including protesting against the Junior Miss pageant, supporting migrant workers and the Civil Rights movement, and writing a sports column (under the alias Baseballs) for the underground student newspaper, *The Rearguard*. The Alabama Education Association, along with support from his colleagues and students and a sympathetic judge saved his job. Larry was also active in AAASS and the Southern Conference on Slavic Studies and was known as a friendly and encouraging mentor to many students and scholars in the field.

Larry wrote several innovative and well-received works on the history of schooling in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, including *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917–1931* (1991), a study of how the Soviet state tried and failed to reinvent schooling, and *Stalin's School: Moscow's Model School No. 25, 1931–1937* (1999), a microstudy of the school attended by children of Party elites in the center of Moscow that he used to show the relationship between the state, institutions, and the people; and how Stalinism played out on the ground. He also co-edited with Ben Eklof and Vera Kaplan *Educational Reform in Post-Soviet Russia: Legacies and Prospects* and was a major contributor to the *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*. Reviewers hailed his “pioneering” studies that used the history of education to illuminate the workings and practices of Stalinism and marveled at his use of oral histories and deep archival research. In all his scholarship, Larry tried to show the personal dimensions of policies that were often far more nuanced than historians realized.

In the late 1990s, Larry came to Kirov and began the equally prolific second phase of his scholarly life. He produced several groundbreaking works (all after his retirement) on local institutions that demonstrated the tension between the local and center and how important it is to the understand regional environment

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to understand the national story. *Grand Theater* (2009), *War, Evacuation, and the Exercise of Power: The Center, Periphery, and Kirov's Pedagogical Institute 1941–1952* (2012), and the acclaimed *Stalin's World War II Evacuations: Triumph and Troubles in Kirov* (2017), all drew on deep research in Kirov and district archives and detailed how institutions cooperated and often resisted the center's orders and how everyday people lived under Stalinism. Larry returned to his dissertation topic with sources that he found in Kirov's Party archive in his last book, *Revising the Revolution: The Unmaking of Russia's Official History of 1917* (2021), which shows how historians of Viatka (Kirov) wrote a balanced history of the 1917 Revolution, which clashed with and was eventually defeated by the monochromatic history favored in Moscow. Larry Holmes became synonymous with regional studies and reviewers saw his work as essential reading for scholars and students.

I met Larry through our shared love of Kirov/Viatka. One of the biggest joys of going to Kirov was to see him at the archive and discuss over lunch at the *stolovaia* the great nugget that he had just uncovered, usually about a personality or some dispute that was usually funny and poignant. He welcomed fellow western scholars, like Samantha Lomb and Ben Eklof, who came to the region. Larry became part of the Kirov community—he proudly told me with a chuckle that one of his friends labeled him a *kriashen kirovchan*. It was true, though. Many of his friends were there; he published microhistories of Kirov's School no. 9 (the local equivalent of Moscow's School no. 25) and Kirov's soccer team Dynamo; and Russian scholars appreciated his work. He purchased an apartment in Kirov, and became a staple in the archives, especially the former Party archives (GASPI KO). COVID and Russia's war with Ukraine kept Larry from Kirov for two years, but he was finally able to return in fall of 2022. He was thrilled to be back doing what he loved. He cared about people there, both in history and those around him. Remembrances after his passing have come from Larry's long list of friends and admirers in Kirov including archivists, historians, librarians, and students who respected him as one of their own. I cannot imagine Kirov without him.

Larry had an infectious enthusiasm for Russian history, Kirov, baseball, teaching, running, dogs, music, friendship, and just about everything else in life. Like so many others, I always came away from talking with him laughing and feeling better about the world. The field has lost a gem.

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