

This article was previously published in the 2012 SEES Newsletter. Giullian, Jon (2012). Memorial reminiscence. "Murlin Croucher: the Magician of Slavic Book Collecting." *ACRL Slavic and East European Section Newsletter*, 28 (2012): 70-78. NOTE: Cites to this article should be made to the SEES Newsletter available online at the URL immediately below. https://digital.lib.washington.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/1773/19727/SEES_Newsletter2012.pdf?sequence=1

Murlin Croucher:

Magician of Slavic Book Collecting

To Murlin Croucher, from Jon Giullian, on the occasion of his retirement.

<p>MURLIN'S TALE by JON CHRISTOPHER GIULLIAN</p> <p>Of Murlin wise I learned to search,-- Search by title, search by name,</p> <p>Checking titles, holdings too, Day in, day out, yet never the same.</p> <p>I searched in Russian, Polish, Czech,-- New books adding to the shelf, Old dups trading on exchange.</p> <p>In the heart of the search peals a tale, Which only apprentices hear,</p> <p>Whether it waken joy or fear, Smiling faces begin to wail,</p> <p>And they who hear will remember still Long past thy final hour</p>	<p>MERLIN'S SONG by RALPH WALDO EMERSON</p> <p>Of Merlin wise I learned a song,-- Sing it low, or sing it loud,</p> <p>It is mightier than the strong, And punishes the proud.</p> <p>I sing it to the surging crowd,-- Good men it will calm and cheer, Bad men it will chain and cage.</p> <p>In the heart of the music peals A strain, Which only angels hear;</p> <p>Whether it waken joy or rage, Hushed myriads hark in vain,</p> <p>Yet they who hear it shed their age, And take their youth again.</p>
--	---

Thank you, dear friend for imparting your knowledge and for sharing your laughter!

Bibliographer

Murlin was passionate about the collection at Indiana. He gave his life and soul to building that collection, a well-balanced collection across the various languages and disciplines. As Murlin's apprentice, I spent many an afternoon searching catalogs, sending out exchange lists, and conversing with a master of bibliography. Murlin himself, at times, seemed to be a living bibliography. I was astounded how he could just talk about Mezhev and all the early Russian bibliographies as if they were favorites on his shelf. He seemed to know them all by heart. He knew where they began, what grew out of them, as well as the current bibliographies being published. I'm sure that the many years spent compiling his magnum opus, *Slavic Studies: A Guide to Bibliographies, Encyclopedias, and Handbooks* in both of its editions has something to do with it. As such, I would suggest that Murlin was greatest US Slavic "bibliographer" in our field. Maybe that's taking things a bit too far, but he really was the epitome of what it means to be a bibliographer. We all do a little bibliography, but over the past several decades our jobs have become more diversified.

While working on my MLS degree at Indiana University, I took Murlin's class on Slavic Bibliography. The great thing about Murlin's class is that he made us go get the books, look at them, handle them, summarize them. He didn't just give us a list and say this is what the field is. He expected us to be familiar with all the tools of the trade, the old as well as the new. And after we had shared what information we gleaned from looking at the books, he would point out details that we hadn't noticed. I keep going back to his Guide with its concise and analytical annotations. When you produce a bibliography like that, you really know the content. This knowledge enabled him to answer reference questions, the really difficult ones that required one to dig deep into historical materials. And he just seemed to be able to pull it out of his head. And it is for those tough questions that his Guide is so useful. His course, as I remember, was designed around the content his Guide, emphasizing the "landmarks" of Slavic bibliography that we needed know. I do remember wondering whether I would ever know all of the information that he knows. Murlin became a great bibliographer because he worked on bibliographies all the time he was building the IU collections.

I worked under Murlin while he was putting the finishing touches on the second edition, when ProCite's inability to handle diacritics nearly proved its downfall. I remember coming into work and hearing Murlin talk about how he had spent half the night (since he couldn't sleep anyway) typing in diacritics into the second edition. From time to time, I would get an update on how many thousands of diacritics he had put in the night before. The second edition of the Guide incorporates a difference classification system than the first; a system which I think works better. This is the other thing that I learned from Murlin - general principles of classification. He taught me to envision how the materials would be used. What would be the most useful way of finding materials? Murlin would frequently comment on how usable a dictionary or index is. Not only

did he take into consideration how the content was organized, but also the physical properties of the books that facilitate ease of use.

When I was working on my bibliography for the course (bibliography of bilingual Russian dictionaries held at IU), I learned how to code them in ProCite so that they would appear in the right order in the generated bibliography. And then I found myself having to go through and make certain edits b/c ProCite had some technical problems. I also learned how to write annotations in Murlin's class; what a concise, informative annotation consists of. His Guide provided an example that I could follow. Many of them also included an analytical element.

I looked forward to his class every week. We never seemed to have enough time to talk about all the books. The 2.5 hours always went by fast. Some people might think that studying bibliography for 2.5 hours in an enclosed room in the Wells library (with poor ventilation and no natural light, and of course sometimes it was a little warm) would put anyone to sleep, but strangely enough it was fascinating. His brief personal experiences with the materials and stories of book collecting showed us how much fun bibliography could be.

Slavic Librarians Guild

Murlin's long-time colleagues will recall their week-long summer vacations spent at Slavic librarian boot camp in Urbana-Champaign. Murlin frequently talked about these summer workshops sponsored by the Slavic and East European Library at UIUC, which he affectionately referred to as the "Illinois Summer *gulag* – which I love." It was for Murlin, "the greatest little place we have to meet colleagues informally, shop talk, and relax," in the Urbana *banya*. Just three weeks after I started my Slavic librarian job at Kansas, I finally had the chance to attend the workshop, this one dedicated to digital text encoding. As a brand new librarian, it was at the Slavic librarian's workshop that I made some of my first professional contacts with colleagues and vendors (i.e. Andy Spencer, Larry Miller, Miranda Remnek, Jeff Strandberg, and others); a sort of induction into the guild of Slavic librarianship. I toured the renowned Slavic Reading Room at UIUC, browsed the fabulous reference shelves, talked shop with colleagues, and slept in my cramped quarters just as Murlin did summer after summer. It was fabulous!

Storyteller

Murlin had a knack for storytelling. Not for the fictional type, but for human stories, glimpses from the episodes of his life. It is one of my saddest regrets, that I did not take the time to record the wealth of anecdotes from Murlin's life. A few years ago I had dreamed of recording Murlin's stories, so that the world could share what a few of us, who worked with Murlin every day, enjoyed so much about our friend. I wanted to call it the *Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Murlin Croucher: University Book Collector and Friend*. Maybe someday it will materialize;

or maybe this collection of reminiscences, from the *kollektiv* is just that – a brief collective history of Murlin’s life. It is, in my opinion, a tragedy that most of the stories that Murlin shared with his apprentices, while we sat in his broom closet on the 5th floor office of the Main Library (renamed the Herman B. Wells Library), went with Murlin to the grave. Fortunately I have been able to compile a few of these stories from letters and comments he made on email. I share here on little one gem about his eventful book-buying trips from a letter to me dated August 24, 2010:

The champagne incident actually happened in Moscow. When I went on a book buying trip to Russia, I managed to hook up with a mafia who helped me and made the trip a success. The Moscow mafia person was exceptionally nice to me. When he took me to the airport, just before I handed in my luggage, he zipped open the suitcase and dropped in a jar of caviar and a bottle of champagne. It was enormously kind of him, but the luggage compartment is not pressurized and the champagne was. So it exploded in the suitcase – into a thousand shreds of glass. When I got my luggage I noticed the tremendous stench of alcohol. People kept looking at me thinking it was me. I flew to Munich, and when my Austrian friend met me, he took two steps backward and said in his pure German accent “You shtink of Russia!”

*Just one of the joys of traveling to Eastern Europe.
With heartfelt wishes, Murlin*

For me coming to work was more than coming to work. When Murlin was there it was work interspersed with delightful conversation, and always a good laugh. I think the clearest memory that I have of Murlin is his jovial laugh. He was such a delightful man. I miss his company.

One day I remember asking Murlin about meetings at AAASS. Afraid of my own ignorance I felt intimidated by the aura of meetings at academic conferences. Yet Murlin, as he always did, put me at ease, telling me how much he loved going to AAASS meetings, describing the fun and laughter that Slavic librarians would share at their meetings as they conducted their business. Who says meetings are boring? Not when Slavic librarians gather. “They were delightful,” he would say. I soon found out why Murlin felt this way.

I was thrilled when I learned that Murlin had played the violin, studying for a short time at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. I too played the violin. As he described how much he enjoyed studying the violin I asked Murlin whether he still played. Following a slight change of expression, Murlin said that he had sold his violin to pay for college. Oh how he wished that he still had his violin. I remember my own fond memories of studying the violin. In one letter to Murlin I described how I had to “fake a few notes” from time to time while playing in the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra. I share this brief anecdote from Murlin’s musical past in a letter dated July 10, 2010.

I am familiar with that “faking some notes.” I had to do that at the University of Chicago when I was given first chair for a wonderful, brilliant, beautiful German student who played the Bruch violin concerto. He was so perfect, that I am not sure he was human.”

And another letter, this one Murlin’s contribution to the dialogue on gifts, sent to Slavlibs on May 27, 2010, this letter shows Murlin jumping into the fray of a lively discussion on the list, as he was known to do from time to time. I call this letter Murlin’s “Ode to Gifts:”

One side of this dilemma not covered is the emotional one between librarian and giver. I remember one donor who gave us about 60 books of Soviet statistics. He was very proud of his collection of mainly “ezhegodniki.” When asked if he would like a letter of detail for the gift (over 90% of which were duplicates to the Indiana collection), he said no. Almost a year later, at tax time, he phoned and wanted a list of each book he had donated. He was furious.

A retired professor gave me most of his collection a year after he retired and decided that he would eventually move back to Croatia. There were many unique books because they were self-published by his émigré compatriots. It was nice to add these unique publications. But every month he would come to the office spitting teeth from anger that these works were not listed as part of the collection. He never learned that the card catalog had been replaced by the computer catalog. Worst, is that he often chewed gum, and the poor man could not chew gum and walk at the same time, so every time I saw him, I knew I would lose two hours of the afternoon.

A wonderful, if eccentric old lady offered me all of her old Russian books. I went to her house to get them. They turned out to be about 100 volumes of paperback editions of Russian classics. But I needed to be kind and thank her for the wonderful gift. Sadly, she kept her old books in her chicken coops so the boxes were covered in chicken doo-doo, feathers and spider webs. (Remember, this is Indiana.) But when I left, she seemed happy.

Dr. Henry Cooper used to receive free books from Slovene publishers. They were academic, but beyond my budget to purchase, often between \$60.00 and \$110.00 apiece. At least I was able to offer him a tax write off for up to \$500.00, for these valuable gifts. He was happy. I was happy.

But I am wasting everyone’s time. A danger of being lonely and retired. But there is this aspect of the emotional toll on giver and receiver.

I miss so many of you, Murlin

And we miss you. May you rest in peace. Your legacy will forever live on in the collection of the Indiana University Slavic collections

Exchanger Extraordinaire

Who could reminisce about Murlin without mentioning exchanges. As all of Murlin's colleagues will remember, he worked very hard to set up and maintain exchanges, masterminding Indiana University's broad exchange programs with dozens of libraries across Eastern Europe. I'm confident that we all know how passionate Murlin was about exchanges. Although he is often remembered as the guru of exchanges, Murlin loved good vendors. Whether by exchange or vendor, Murlin's goal was to collect the tomes that would build a collection. He was loathe to give up thriving exchanges but had no qualms about replacing a fledgling exchange with a vendor who could supply the goods at a reasonable price, or vice versa:

I do not think that we can categorize dealers, exchanges, sources. It depends on our personal relations with them, and how each one serves our needs, and we serve theirs - how our libraries are set up to deal with these people. If an exchange is a pain to library processing, or expensive to the library, get rid of it. Same thing for dealers.¹

The next anecdote comes from Murlin's rich experience with exchanges, which shows the flare that made Murlin so successful in building one of our premier Slavic research collections:

I would like to add another note, perhaps frivolous, but in tone with a paper once given at a AAASS, if an exchange works well, use it - if not get rid of it. Same with a direct purchasing agent.

Once I had some fun with the Estonian Academy of Sciences. They were just becoming computerized but could not use their work stations because they lacked certain computer parts. To make a long and intriguing story short, I found an electronics company in New York City, owned by an Estonian. I told him the problem. Through subtle contacts he learned exactly what they needed and could send it to them. I said that it could not be sent to Estonia, because at that time all Estonian materials were routed through Moscow. The Academy would never see these computer parts.

So he made arrangements. The parts were sent to Helsinki. Two Estonian librarians took a vacation to Helsinki and came back with boxes of computer equipment. 8 months later Indiana received package after package after package of Estonian imprints from the 19th century. The books were mainly in German, Estonian and some early ones in Latin.

¹ Excerpts from a letter Murlin wrote about exchanges and their place in collection development.

Almost all were unique holdings in this country. Of course circumstances are different today. But still, some publications are only available through exchange, like many of the fine works from Olomouc University.²

My best, Murlin

And my best to you dear departed friend!

Finale

Murlin understood that the age of the traditional role of subject specialist as book collector was changing. Technological innovation often transforms society, and Murlin understood that we have to ride the waves of change:

If we want to maintain our Slavic collections we need to ride the surging appearance and disappearance of sources like riding a surf board. With our emerging electronic library world, disastrous drop in grad-students and faculty in our field, I am now a fossil. My personal question is, does it matter to try and maintain a super research collection in our field? Pay raises are based on doing everything but building a collection. The unbelievably complicated situation of online American and British serials occupies administrators' attention; and we are not part of that group.

So do we continue to work 10 and 12 hour days finding the best dealers and exchanges, and cost benefit ways, and slowly die in our wonderful 19th century book world, which is still necessary for Slavic acquisitions? Or just join the group, say the hell with it, use any dealer or exchange that saves us time so that we can join the team?

It's a tough question, and one that we are all working through. Murlin lived and adapted to the conditions of his time, and he was a master at building collections with exceptional skill, flare, and sometimes magic. I will be forever grateful for the training I received at the Magician's hand. He taught me to love the research collection even as the definition of a research collection changes.

In loving memory of Murlin Croucher, mentor and friend.

Jon C. Giullian
2012

² From a letter to Slavlibs dated July 16, 2010