

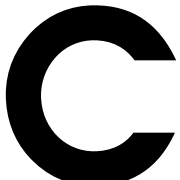
## SYMPOSIUM

# Variety and Adventure in the Life of Carl Linden

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**Abstract:** In his long life Carl Linden lived variously and wonderfully. For more than half a century he was a teacher and promoter of Great Books in the classroom and in the neighborhood. Great Books in his hands and mind transformed him into a kind of latter-day Socrates, always questioning, always smiling, sometimes teasingly. As a naturalist he was a hiker/biker on the C&O Canal towpath and promoter of it, as well. His scholarly pursuits took him to Eastern Europe, especially to Russia and Ukraine, about which he wrote and taught for four decades. Finally, he was a bon vivant whose Socratic ways won him laurels in the classroom and friends in the places where good fellows meet.

**Keywords:** Bethesda, MD, Charles Elliott, C&O Canal, George Washington University, Great Books, IERES (Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies), James Millar, Justice William O. Douglas, Khrushchev, Leonardo, Marx, Machiavelli, Monacacy Aqueduct, Paul Carter, Robert Tucker, Soviet Political Theory, St. John's College, towpath, University of Lviv, Ukraine

arl Linden's life was one of infinite variety. Perhaps his most far-reaching endeavor was in the realm of Great Books, the prevailing theme honoring him here today. A teaching natural, Carl traced his Great Books commitment to St. John's College in Annapolis, where he taught before coming to The George Washington University (GWU) in 1971. St. John's holding that, "the way to a liberal education lies through a direct and sustained confrontation with the books in which the greatest minds of our civilization have expressed themselves" was crucial to Carl's teaching during and long after

he left that institution.<sup>1</sup> Four decades later (on August 21, 2012) the St. John's faculty resolved "to express its condolences to his family and its gratitude for his devoted service as a member of the faculty."<sup>2</sup>

In teaching Great Books, Carl settled on the Socratic method, one of directly querying his students. He continued this mode in teaching Soviet political theory and politics and freshman honors at GWU. Great Books was for Carl more than an *academic* tool: they moved him to a public audience. In Great Books sessions in the community for more than half a century he taught the classics—spanning politics, history, literature, and philosophy—over and over, year after year.

Great Books pervaded his discourse, whether written or conversational. A scholarly passage, one unlikely from a Sovietologist, reads in part: "The story of Marx repeated in the experience of his revolutionary disciples recalls to mind something of the Sophoclean dramatic commentary on human nature through the Oedipus myth."<sup>3</sup>

When I wrote a piece on the canals of Milan for *Along the Towpath*, editor Linden reminded me that Leonardo, who had worked for the Sforza duke of Milan variously as engineer and architect, likely had invented the crucially important mitered (beveled) lock gate.

Whether in the company of colleague, student, or even casual acquaintance, he loved injecting, often mischievously, the thoughts of great men and their works. This he would do without pedantry but rather in good humor with an infectious smile. His favorites were, yes, Machiavelli, whom he thought was victim of a bad press, and, of course, Aristotle and Plato.

Professionally, Linden taught political science in the Elliot School of International Affairs at GWU. There he won recognition as a professor of Russian/Soviet politics. He was, moreover, associated for more than forty years with the Elliot School's interdisciplinary Institute for Sino-Soviet Studies (founded in 1961 and later the Institute

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for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies [IERES]).<sup>4</sup> Twice during his tenure he was in fact, if not named, its director.

After serving in Air Force intelligence during the Korean War, Carl earned a master's degree in Russian studies from Harvard (1956) and a PhD (1965) from The George Washington University. From 1956 to 1965 he worked as a political analyst for the CIA-affiliated Foreign Broadcast Information Service. The stint at CIA led to his publishing *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership* (1966), his best known publication, which synthesized his thinking about Soviet leadership politics as he had argued in the journal *Problems of Communism* in the early 1960s.<sup>5</sup> While Carl essentially used Khrushchev as the vehicle for studying leadership, there was more to it than that. His also chronicled the Soviet leader's actions from 1957, when he had thwarted a coup, to 1964, when a subsequent one did overthrow him. Carl's *Khrushchev* provided both a neat study of the man and his method and the challenges confronting Soviet leadership after Stalin. As Sovietologist Robert Tucker observed: "The volume will stand as a distinguished contribution to scholarship in Soviet studies and a model of the sophisticated analysis of Soviet internal political processes which contemporary Western students of the subject are able to produce."<sup>6</sup>

Tucker's appraisal stood until Soviet archives, opened briefly in the early 1990s, brought new revelations. The Soviet leadership issues that Linden raised in this "classic of Kremlinology" coincided with his appointment to the GWU political science faculty in 1971.<sup>7</sup> Carl's concern about political leadership sparked another critical study, *The Soviet Party-State: The Politics of Ideocratic Despotism*, a stinging critique of Communist Party tyranny and by some regarded as his most perceptive work.<sup>8</sup>

Carl Linden, an inveterate traveler, buttressed scholarship and teaching about Russian politics by partaking of the country's culture as well. Over the Christmas holidays 1986–1987, his GWU colleague Charles Elliott first fired his interest in the arts in Moscow and Leningrad-St. Petersburg. In 1996 he and I traveled to the storied Russian North, the natural beauty of which accorded well with Carl's beloved northern Sweden. He grew captivated as well by the man-made environment—the wooden architecture, the masonry churches and monasteries of Moscow, Yaroslavl', and Vologda, and the commercial structures of Kostroma.

Late in 1998 Carl and I were GWU Petrarch lecturers at the Ivan Franko University in Lviv, Ukraine. Carl led off speaking of the American Constitution, comparing it to the Soviet one; to the Declaration of Independence; and to Jefferson and the Federalists. His remarks, with easy allusions to Great Books thinkers, invited and stimulated lively dialogue. Carl was enchanted by the Lviv's central plaza, an architectural gem of Renaissance Poland. Another of Lviv's enticing cultural entities was its grand theater, a relic of the late Habsburg era. Ponderous and ornate, it staged opera and ballet, which he greatly enjoyed.<sup>9</sup> On the final leg of our Ukraine travels, in Kiev, we indulged ourselves further in opera and ballet. Carl, ever sensitive to religious settings, was especially taken by the masonry churches of ancient

Kiev; he enjoyed no less an outdoor museum of restored and relocated wooden architecture. This community, blanketed in snow, was replete with original houses, shops, a tavern, and even costumed Cossacks who welcomed us. Carl delighted our hosts by donning their garb, sitting astride a mount, and waving his saber at imagined foes.

Carl's combining a love of nature, art, and history found its fullest expression in his liking canals the world over, especially the C&O Canal.<sup>10</sup> Conceived as a chain of canals and locks and dating to 1828, it stretched the 185 miles from Georgetown, the District of Columbia, to Cumberland, Maryland. In supplanting the unnavigable Potomac and connecting with the Great Allegheny Passage through Central Pennsylvania, this avenue was conceived as a link between the Chesapeake and the Ohio Valley. It was hailed a rival to the Erie Canal in opening the West.

Carl loved hiking and biking along the canal's towpath, boating its waterways, and enjoying the camaraderie, which doing so entailed. As editor of *Along the Towpath*, he publicized this canal; as president of the C&O Canal Association he lobbied politicians to preserve and support it. Carl had on several occasions joined Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas on his hikes from Georgetown to Cumberland to promote its becoming a national park. He also lobbied hard and successfully for preserving a Canal landmark, the Monocacy Aqueduct, which transported the canal over the Monocacy River. That Carl's Bethesda home lay situated high above the Potomac and Canal and just a few miles from the Great Falls of the Potomac no doubt energized him in his canal endeavors.

Carl was a present-day Socrates in still another way, a *bon vivant* living the good life—eating, drinking, voluble about big ideas, and with good humor to spare—among his extended family, students, colleagues, and many, many friends. One pictures his taking lunch or dining in diverse places with diverse companions—with colleague Jim Millar over clam chowder and Chardonnay at Kinkead's in Foggy Bottom, with fellow hikers on the Monocacy Aqueduct towpath having a pot roast luncheon at Bassett's in Poolesville, lunching with diplomat friend Paul Carter on a brisk autumn day in Cracow, Poland, picnicking in a birch grove near Arkhangelsk in North Russia, enjoying an early winter outing in the Ukrainian Carpathians, or hosting Russian academics at a chic Moscow restaurant. But most of all Carl enjoyed Christmas Eve family gatherings in his Bethesda home replete with a smorgasbord of Swedish delights. Wherever he was, humanist Carl Linden the teacher instinctively connected learning with living. He lived as well as taught the Great Books.

#### NOTES

1. See The Great Books Program at St. John's College on the Internet.
2. I am indebted first to Lijun Gu, who wrote the full citation of which this quotation is only a part, and to Jack Moran, who forwarded it to me.
3. Carl Linden, *The Soviet Party-State: The Politics of Ideocratic Despotism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 28. I am indebted to Jack Moran for this reference.
4. *History of IERES* (November 2011): 1–7. See also www.IERES.org.

5. On pages 2–3 of his work *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership with an Epilogue on Gorbachev Updated Edition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), Linden details the argument between two schools of thought about Soviet leadership and cites the issues of *Problems of Communism* (from late 1963 to early 1964) in which it played out.

6. Foreword to Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership* (1990), viii.

7. *History of IERES*, 2.

8. *Soviet Party-State*, introduction, vii–viii.

9. Whether performed in the grand old Habsburg theatre of Lviv (Austro-Hungarian Lemburg), the Kennedy Center of Washington, DC, or Saturday renditions of the Metropolitan Opera on HDTV in local DC cinemas, Carl was a devotee of the full range of ballet and opera.

10. See especially Gary Anthes, *The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 2013).

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