

THE KREMLIN KRONICLE:

A Short Reflection

John Mark Mastakas, Virginia Tech
Digital History Prize Winner 2017

Every year, the Virginia Tech History Department gives out an award for outstanding work in digital history. The 2017 Winner of this award was John Mark Mastakas for his blog The Kremlin Kronicle. In Volume 7 of the VTUHR, we wanted to give our readers a chance to learn about opportunities for research outside of the standard research article. Digital formats for presenting historical research are one possible route to take when deciding how to present a work of original research. To give the reader an idea of the kinds of topics he researched and how he sees digital history contributing to his research, we asked John Mark to write a brief reflection on his experience.

–the Editors

The *Kremlin Kronicle* is a blog that was created for the History of Soviet Culture course offered at Virginia Tech in the fall of 2015. The forum explores various cultural topics throughout the Soviet Union's history and draws conclusions about the role culture played in social and political change. The blog looks specifically at the impact of the Orthodox Church, alcohol consumption amongst Soviets, literacy across the country, and other subjects to examine the role that various social norms played throughout the country's history.

Though the Soviet Union lasted for less than one hundred years, it has an incredibly dense and complex history. Through *The Kremlin Kronicle*, I was able to dive into a variety of topics of interest to me and expand my general understanding of the country. As Americans perceiving the world through the lens of American history, we tend to look at the Soviet Union and its people as an enemy, but through the course of working on this blog I was able to see the number of people



in that country who were taken advantage of by their government. After learning about their poor treatment at the hands of their government, the blog gave me the medium to better understand the common people of the Soviet Union and develop empathy for them and an appreciation for their culture.

Using a digital format for this assignment opened a number of doors for me that the conventional pen and paper would have otherwise not allowed me to utilize. First, the format of the blog makes it easy for the general public to access. The blog displays all of my posts on one page with large thumbnails that truly captured the essence of my articles in order to catch people's attention. The blog also gave me the ability to add artwork, videos and other media directly into the article. These multimedia options gave the blog more character, and helps the reader get a more visual understanding of the topic they are reading. Along the same lines, the additional sensory descriptors were useful in that they provided a more hands-on and informal way of conveying information about Soviet culture and history. One of the unique characteristics of writing on an electronic format is the ability to hyperlink articles directly into the body of your writing. This is extremely useful when writing for an audience that is not well-versed in the field in which you are writing. For example, when I referenced a concept or historical event on my blog, I could directly link the source into the key work or concept I was describing to give the reader something that they could read more about, rather than using more words to summarize a source.

In all, writing *The Kremlin Chronicle* was a fantastic experience that helped me simultaneously learn about the culture of the Soviet Union while also learning how to best integrate technology with my historical analysis in a format that is easier on the senses and more engaging to a modern audience, while also maintaining academic integrity.

Permalink to blog site:

Full Site:

The Kremlin Kronicle (live site): <https://jmm12blog.wordpress.com/>
(perma link record): <https://perma.cc/U8L5-K9PJ>

Articles:

Who is Katerina Lvovna Izmailova?: <https://perma.cc/48LQ-652D>

Holy Russia and her Tribulations: <https://perma.cc/3PKZ-XSFZ>

The Adventures of the Little Red Devils: <https://perma.cc/E44T-QDUQ>

Don't Steal From Stalin: <https://perma.cc/BX7V-92JE>

Flying High (Stalinism): <https://perma.cc/9XU5-FEBX>

Tanks, Tractors, and Soviet Russia: <https://perma.cc/K8LB-VCXQ>

Protecting Mother Russia Through the Church: <https://perma.cc/ACE4-3AX6>

Food (or the Lack Thereof) for Thought: <https://perma.cc/ACE4-3AX6>

Let's Throw a Party: <https://perma.cc/BV8X-H8CD>

Progressing the Soviet Union One Word at a Time: <https://perma.cc/VN43-TFM7>

One More Drink?: <https://perma.cc/7A5W-2JJE>



About the Author:

John Mark Mastakas is a senior History major, with two minors in Science, Technology, and Law (STL) and Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE). He will be graduating in the spring of 2018 with an Honors Baccalaureate degree that is highlighted by his thesis, “Nuclear Radiation and the Environment: Analyzing Fallout Countermeasures through the Scope of Reindeer and Sheep.” During his time at Virginia Tech, John Mark was involved in a number of organizations including as President of Beta Theta Pi, Member at Large in the Student Government Association, and Vice President of Membership for Omicron Delta Kappa. Next year John Mark will be attending William and Mary Law School.