Fisher Forum
“Early Russian Itineraries”

This year’s Fisher Forum, “Early Russian Itineraries,” organized by Associate Professor John Randolph (History) and PhD Candidate Rachel Koroloff (History) brought 21 scholars from the US, Europe and the UK together with professors and graduate students from the University of Illinois’s departments of History and Slavic Languages and Literatures. Participants discussed exciting new trends in Russian imperial history that focus on tracing and analyzing different regimes of movement and mobility, or “itineraries,” throughout the long eighteenth century.

The conference commenced with a public reception on Friday, June 14th, which was opened with remarks by Alisha Kirchoff (Associate Director, REEEC) and John Randolph (History). The evening featured professor Randolph’s remarks on the intellectual ambitions of the conference and was followed by a general discussion about the new methodological and conceptual approaches to Russian imperial history that a focus on mobility offers. Certainly, the highlight of the opening reception was the standing ovation for Ralph and Ruth Fisher, founders of the Fisher Forum in attendance throughout the three-day conference.

From Friday, June 14th through Sunday June 16th, a series of panels featured presentations and discussions that outlined a number of discrete “itineraries” at work in Russian imperial history, some traced through various objects of exchange (medicines, tobacco, botanical specimens and diplomatic correspondence) and others created socially by different classes and communities of travelers (peasants, boat haulers, old believers, employees of the Russian-American Company). Several panel discussions sought to disentangle the ways in which the production of movement (e.g. the building of roads, the advent of steam ships) coincided with larger economic, political and cultural changes affecting the landscape of the Russian Empire at this time.

In a special session on Saturday afternoon, Kelly O’Neill (History, Harvard University) introduced her recent project Imperiia, in which she combined the use historical GIS software and the digitization of a substantial nineteenth century Russian atlas in order to create a web-based portal sharing her research with others. Discussion at this session was characterized by a lively mix of technical questions about the use of various software and resources, and broader ruminations on the utility, longevity and value of this new and powerful area of research.

The closing remarks delivered by professor John Randolph on Sunday afternoon pointed to the role of mobility as a “techno-social phenomenon” that simultaneously pushes historians in new directions, towards new techniques in digital history and mapping, all the while underscoring the continuing power and utility of older ways of thinking about and charting historical change.

Participants in the 2013 Ralph and Ruth Fisher Forum, “Early Russian Itineraries,” were Gregory Afinogenov (Harvard), Brian Boeck (DePaul), Elena Boeck (DePaul), Rodney Bohac (Kent State), Eugene Clay (Arizona State), Ines García de la Puente (Universität St. Gallen), Sara Dickinson (Università di Genova), Clare Griffin (University College London), Evgeny Grishin (University of Kansas), Rachel Koroloff (Illinois), Kristina Kuentzel-Witt (Universität Hamburg), Alexander Martin (Notre Dame), Kelly O’Neill (Harvard), and Ralph and Ruth Fisher.
Dame), Lindsey Martin (Stanford),
Erika Monahan (University of New
Mexico), Kelly O’Neill (Harvard),
John Randolph (Illinois), Patryk
Reid (Illinois), Matthew Romaniello
(University of Hawai‘i Manōa), Valeria
Sobol (Illinois), Mark Soderstrom
(Aurora University), Susan Smith-
Peter (College of Staten Island),
Willard Sunderland (University of
Cincinnati), Isolde Thyret (Kent
State), and Ilya Vinkovetsky (Simon
Fraser).

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Languages and Literatures.

Rachel Koroloff, co-organizer of this year’s Fisher
Forum, is a Ph.D. Candidate in History at the
University of Illinois. She specializes in 18th century
Russian History, History of Science, History of
Natural History and she is currently completing her
dissertation project entitled “Seeds of Exchange:
Russia’s Apothecary and Botanical Gardens in the
First Half of the Eighteenth Century.”