

*"Russia Collection"*

Kendra Anspaugh

My "Russia Collection", as I elegantly refer to it, is the culmination of an unexplainable fascination that, since childhood, has drawn me to the study of Soviet and earlier Russian history. If one could happen to look at the library records from my early years, this could be evidence by a disproportionate number of borrowings along the lines of a children's biography of Gorbachev or an introduction to the geography of the Soviet Union (to bring up two examples that stick particularly in my memory). The Berlin Wall fell when I was seven years old, and afterwards I diligently worked to memorize the borders and capitals of the newly freed republics; this satisfied my curiosity until some years later, when I first read an article about Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Up to this point I had never known of Russian royalty and was immediately intrigued, and since this period coincided with several new developments in their story (namely the discovery of their burial site and identification of their remains), informal Romanov study was experiencing a kind of rebirth, or at least a renewal of interest on the part of non-historians; hence, several new biographies and historical overviews were published in quick succession. The first of these that I read was Robert Massie's *Romanovs: The Final Chapter*, a copy of which I received as a gift shortly thereafter. I was hooked, immediately and inexorably.

Hence the fifteen books comprising my current "Russia Collection". Most of its components were given as gifts by indulgent, albeit uncomprehending, red-blooded American parents, who probably believed my next step was to commence ranting about the class struggle and waving a red flag. Nevertheless, they graciously catered to my whims and often purchased copies before my initial wide-eyed amazement at the existence of a brand-new book had dissipated - hence a prevalence of first editions in my collection. Others joined the legion after my spotting them, unappreciated, on the bargain shelves at Barnes and Noble; a second-hand bookstore in my hometown was the source of several of the older titles.

In my collection I have tried to focus on the period comprising and immediately preceding the reign of Nicholas II, but occasionally I have branched out to earlier periods as the mood strikes me. The house of Romanov and closely related personages and events are the primary focus throughout, and I choose to place special emphasis on the personal, rather than political, lives of its members.