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Treasures

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"The United States is a very important country in terms of librarianship. The Soviets follow what we do, particularly our use of computers in cataloging, circulation, acquisitions, serials controls, and reference," Robertson says.

Robertson and colleagues toured prestigious libraries in Moscow, Leningrad and Riga, where they were frequently treated to a true librarians' delight — rare book collections, a Soviet forte. Head librarians proudly displayed Voltaire's personal library, letters from George Washington to Russian tsars, and the famed eleventh-century Ostromir Gospel.

The U.S. librarians noticed some rather amazing differences between the Soviet and American approaches to the profession of librarianship, and the role of a library.

Essentially, Soviet librarianship is a female-dominated, high status profession with males gravitating to top administrative positions. The bulk of Soviet librarians only complete a bachelor's degree program with technical and general subject training that includes a focus on librarianship.

"When you get into upper levels of research, it requires a much stronger subject training outside of librarianship. If you work at one of the big libraries you are trained more extensively 'on the job' and chances are you will stay at that library," Robertson says.

Although some claim Soviet technology is leaping ahead in the arms race, Robertson noticed that most Soviet public libraries can't compare with sophisticated automation at work at the University in terms of computerized library procedures.

Soviet libraries manage quite well with methods that have long been considered rudimentary and outdated by their American counterparts, such as manual card production, still a traditional mode in the U.S.S.R. At the University, as well as most other American public libraries, a librarian "calls up" a catalog record in the computer, pushes "produce" and the computer comes up with the card. Soviet libraries, on the other hand, take advantage of an ample labor force and employ a room full of typists to sit at a typewriter and produce cards.

Robertson did see impressive state-of-the-art Hewlett-Packard and Japanese computers in research libraries of the Academy of Science, where the atmosphere is less centralized.

Robertson attributes the technological lag in Soviet public libraries to the extensive influence of a centralized state. Unlike Americans, Soviets don't think in a way conducive to "free-wheeling" or "networking," a method in which American libraries cooperate to pool information and materials.

"Their methods are all rudimen-

tary by U. S. standards but that's just because efficiency is not as important as control in the Soviet Union," he says.

"From their point of view they are serving the public, because the people who should get access to materials are seeing those materials," he says.

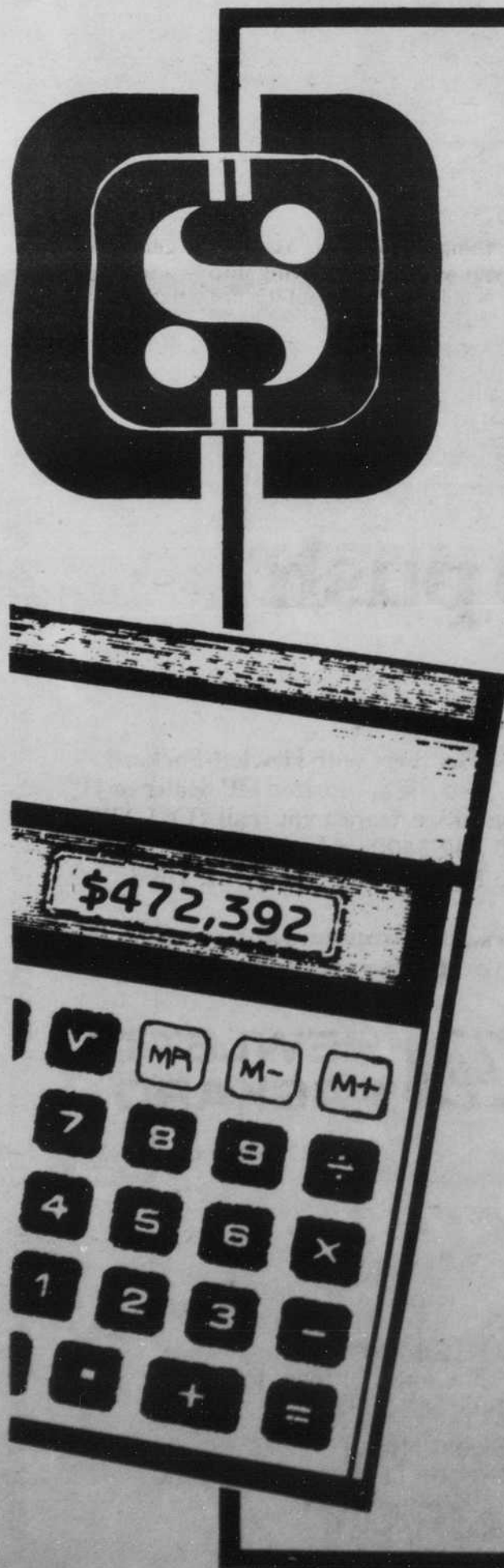
Robertson thinks the Soviets are headed toward automation in libraries, but indicates the Soviets are cautious with anything that deals with the dissemination of information.

Despite a demanding schedule of library tours, the librarians were given plenty of free time to sightsee on their own, converse with Soviets, and form impressions about daily life.

As a result, Robertson discovered a prosperity greater than he had expected. Coinciding with Robertson's view of prosperity were constant billboards and slogans proclaiming Andropov as a benevolent peacemaker presiding over a thriving Soviet state.

Robertson adds that the official line and personal remarks of Soviet citizens reinforced his opinion that Americans don't properly understand the repercussions of war like the Soviet people and that the "foolishly aggressive" Reagan government is forcing the United States into a military stance.

"One elder doorman even told me that Reagan is our Stalin," he says.



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