

ROBERT F. KELLEY, 1894–1976

Robert F. Kelley, one of the earliest American specialists in Soviet studies, died June 2, 1976, in Washington, D.C. A native of Somerville, Mass., he received a B.A., magna cum laude, and an M.A. from Harvard, concentrating on modern European history and the Russian language.

After serving as an officer in the U.S. Army in World War I, Kelley became assistant military attaché to Denmark and Finland as well as a military observer in the Baltic States with headquarters in Riga, Latvia. In the early 1920s he was one of the first Americans to recognize the importance of U.S. understanding of the Soviet Union. He entered the Foreign Service, became chief of the Division of Eastern European Affairs of the Department of State in 1926, and promoted a program to train Americans in Russian language and culture and in applying scholarly principles to research on the new Soviet regime. Among his students were George F. Kennan and Charles E. Bohlen, who later became ambassadors to Moscow. In their memoirs both of them credited him with valuable contributions.

After Kelley left the Foreign Service in 1945, he became interested in Western efforts to help Soviet refugees who wanted to do something constructive abroad on behalf of their fellow countrymen. In the 1950s he participated in the establishment of a U.S. government sponsored radio station beamed to the USSR. Now known as Radio Liberty, it offers news and information not available in official Soviet media through daily shortwave broadcasts in Russian and major languages of the national minorities. As European deputy to the president of Radio Liberty, Kelley worked in Munich until his retirement in 1967.

“Uncle Bob”—as he was affectionately called by his younger American colleagues—will be remembered for his genial humor, keen mind, and insatiable curiosity about Soviet affairs. He was one of the first and most faithful members of the AAASS.

GENE SOSIN

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty