



Dr. Seymour Becker, historian, died October 5, 2020, in NYC at the age of 86. A specialist in 19th and early 20th century Russian history, he taught Russian and European history at Rutgers University from 1962 until his retirement in 2002.

He was among the pioneers in the field of nationalities and empire studies regarding Russia, when very few people realized the importance of studying Russia as an empire. Over his career, he wrote two books and many articles. His first book, *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*, published in 1968, became a classic in the field and was reissued in 2004 due to a renewed interest in Central Asian studies. His second

book, *Nobility and Privilege in Late Imperial Russia*, was published in 1985. Select chapters from his unfinished, third book are being posthumously published in the most recent issues of the international journal *Ab Imperio*, a journal “devoted to the interdisciplinary and comparative study of the history of nationalism and national movements in the post-Soviet space”; he served on the journal’s board since its inception in 1999.

Seymour, or “Sy”, was born in Rochester, NY, in 1934 to Aaron P. Becker and Lena Saperstone Becker, Jewish immigrants from Russia who met in the US. His father graduated from Rochester’s East High in 1920 and sold life insurance; his mother worked as a seamstress. Sy graduated from Benjamin Franklin High School where he was valedictorian, and then earned his BA from Williams College (1956, Summa Cum Laude) and his MA and PhD from Harvard University (1958 and 1963). While at Harvard he met Carol Cohen whom he married in 1957, and they had two children. After accepting the position at Rutgers, he moved with his family to Princeton, NJ, where he lived until 1980. During that time, in 1967-1968 as part of an IREX exchange program, he spent a year in Moscow doing research, and also traveled to Central Asia. In 1980, Sy moved to NYC with Alla Zeide, a Russian émigré and fellow academic, and the two married in 1981. He and Alla spent 2003-2004 in Florence, Italy, while he was Director of the Rutgers Study Abroad Program in Florence.

Sy was known not only for his scholarship, but also for his kindness and generosity as a teacher and PhD advisor, and he maintained relationships with many of his former students as they pursued their own academic careers. He and Alla were frequent hosts in their apartment in NYC to colleagues and friends over the years. He loved classical music and opera, classic movies, National Public Radio, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, travel, and good conversation. Most of all, he loved his family. A constant and avid reader, his knowledge of world history was as wide-ranging as it was deep; he was a dedicated intellectual. Sy owned more books than he had shelves for, but that never stopped him from acquiring additional ones, and he could not walk

past a sidewalk display of used books without stopping to see whether there was a title he needed to buy.

He is survived by his wife of 39 years, Alla Zeide; his children, Susan Becker of North Brunswick, NJ, and Geoffrey Becker and his wife, Nora Sturges, of Baltimore, MD; his grandson, Bruno Becker; his brother, Herbert Becker and his wife, Carol Becker, of Washington, DC; his nephew, Scott Becker and his wife, Flora Qian, of Hong Kong; and his cousins Judy Gordon Hersh, of Denver, CO, and Sanford Gordon, of New York, NY.

A memorial service may be held later in 2021. Tribute gifts can be made to The Yiddish Book Center at yiddishbookcenter.org/join-support. Alternatively, an in-memoriam gift to benefit Rutgers' Alexander Library can be made by making a check payable to "Rutgers University Foundation." In the memo line, write "Alexander Library Gift Fund in memory of Seymour Becker." Mail checks to: Rutgers University Foundation, PO Box 193, New Brunswick, NJ 08903-0193.