FROM THE EDITOR

Often we get suggestions with ideas on projects we should undertake. The “From Our Readers” column of this issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American has a letter which asks for thoughts from both us and our readership regarding the establishment of a university Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies as a way of assuring that if, despite our best intentions, we are forced someday to abandon what we are doing, there will still be a place for materials on our people and a structure to carry on scholarly work.

Since its inception in 1978, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and this, its newsletter, has sought to promote knowledge about our people, and though we hope that both will endure for many more decades, we are realists and understand that even institutions are mortal. We are also well aware that there is only so much our center can do to assure a permanent place, in an academic sense, for Carpatho-Rusyns.

We need to go beyond what we have now. We need to make Carpatho-Rusyn studies an academic pursuit that is as valuable, accessible, and academically rewarding as any similar field. There are many steps to be taken. A Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies is not only one of the most important steps, it is one of the biggest. The idea of a university chair is indeed excellent, and it is an idea that the Carpatho-Rusyn American endorses wholeheartedly.

Carpatho-Rusyns could have a long academic wish list. It would be more than nice if our people could study their language, history, and culture at the university level in many locations in this country, but that is impossible. What is possible and what is necessary in order to achieve the academic stature we deserve, is a larger and broader presence in the world of American education. That means we must create incentives for schools to provide courses in Carpatho-Rusyn studies, and we must develop a program that encourages scholarship in the area of Carpatho-Rusyn studies.

Such a program should include many things: scholarships for those who wish to do graduate work in Carpatho-Rusyn subjects; grants for schools to offer courses at all levels that will benefit our people; grants for scholars to undertake projects that may benefit our community, including research in the United States or Europe; and perhaps grants to develop exchange programs for students from our community to study in Europe and to bring European Carpatho-Rusyn specialists to do research here in America. There are many possibilities on which to expend our resources, and the concept of endowing a Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies can encompass them all, as well as assure the study of our people and our culture the status it deserves in the academic world. A well-funded Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies at a major, prestigious university would allow not only courses, scholarships, grants, and research work, it would at the same time ensure permanancy through a perpetual fund dedicated to Carpatho-Rusyns alone.

Just as the very idea of a Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies is a grand one, the effort required to achieve it will be grand too. The entire Carpatho-Rusyn community will have not only to cooperate, but to give the goal its active support. There are many dimensions to such a project, from leadership to trust funds, to grass-roots organization, to time frames, etc. There will have to be agreement on many things, from nomenclature to fund raising technique to the institution at which the chair would be endowed. It will be expensive, for to be worthwhile it will have to be at a leading university and will require an endowment of between $1.5 and $2 million. It will be well worth it, however, because it will give us the enduring status and prestige we need to attract our own people and others to our rich heritage.

The $1.5 million to $2 million sum seems very large, but it is well within the means of our community, especially if we can overcome our differences and work together with the support of our churches and fraternals. It can be $1 or $2 from each person of Carpatho-Rusyn descent in America or perhaps even less. It can be $1000 from 1500 to 2000 Carpatho-Rusyn Americans with a sincere interest in their heritage and a willingness to give generously over a period of perhaps several years. It can be the philanthropy of a few very wealthy Carpatho-Rusyn Americans wanting to give something to their people. In reality, it is all of these — the overwhelming generosity of a few combined with smaller sums, at just a great a sacrifice, of many others. It is giving from among us all, rich and poor alike, churches and fraternals included, that will make a Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies a fact rather than a dream.

There would be many benefits to such an undertaking beyond its own realization. We would not only be endowing a Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies, we would be leaving a legacy of achievement through cooperation not only to our own future generations, but to the rest of the world, a legacy that would demonstrate how our people can work together to achieve worthwhile goals, not just to their own benefit, but to the benefit of society as a whole. It would mark our coming of age in America more than anything we have done to date.

Though this idea obviously has our support, it is your support that will matter. Let us know what you think. We are very happy to start the ball rolling, so to speak, but first a candid examination of all aspects of the project from as many points of view as possible is needed along with some idea of the amount of support its organizers can expect from the community. We believe that the Carpatho-Rusyn American ties together those of our community who care the most, not only about the past of our people but about their present and future. Thus, we must turn to you not only for support, but for leadership in weighing this proposal and ultimately seeing it through. Its success will not come easy, and more than anything it will take workers, so let us know not only your attitude toward the project and any ideas you may have to offer, but your willingness to work towards its success.

A university Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies is a great idea with tremendous benefit to our people, but unless we carry it out, it will not be done. It can be the contribution of our generation to our people. It is our job to do and the time is now.
The life of Nykyfor Drovnjak is truly the stuff of fairy tales. From a foolish and outcast beggar there developed a world renowned artist whose name remains a source of pride among the people from whom he derived. Yet it is precisely here that the great absurdity begins.

Nykyfor, who did not even know how to speak Polish, who from beginning to end developed artistically under the influence of the wonder of eastern Christian icons, who was three times deported to western Poland, who returned three times to his native Lemko Region, who was isolated from foreign influences — it is this same Nykyfor whose works have had subjective and objective 'Polishness' thrust upon them. Falsified facts from his life, tendentious interpretations regarding his creative motivations, and a lack of feeling and understanding for the complicated psychology of this unfortunate artist all serve the cause of "proving" his ostensible Polishness. Despite the Polishness accredited to Nykyfor, one can detect the full gamut of Lemko life and symbolism both in his career and in his outstanding creative works.

Nykyfor Drovnjak was born on May 21, 1895 in the small town of Krynica (Nowy Sącz district) in what is today south-central Poland. His mother was Jevdokija Drovnjak, the daughter of Hryhorij and Tatjana Krenyc'kyj from the nearby village of Powroznik/Povoroznyk; his father was unknown. Baptised in the local Greek Catholic Church, he was given the name Jepyfan. This name was uncommon in the Lemko Region, although a priest would often give a child of an unwedded mother a strange name which would by itself distinguish the child from others. The name Nykyfor, by which the artist from Krynica is so well known, is actually a nickname that is much more understandable and normal for Lemkos.

Nykyfor came into the world in particularly unfortunate circumstances. The question of his actual father was and remains uncertain. His mother, who until the end of her days was a servant, lived in poverty. The youngster never finished school and he did not even know how to write. At best he could scribe large printed letters, as is evident on his paintings. But in place of these shortcomings, nature endowed Nykyfor with a great talent. And despite a career clouded with legends created by people who never will be able to understand all the contradictions and conflicts of his life, there existed beyond the normal concept of happiness a solidly-founded existence directed by its own logic and creative power. In a word, he lived in his own manner.

Nykyfor remained in his native Krynica among fellow Lemkos. His favorite spot was the wall near the health clinic, where he loved to sit the whole day and paint, and where he sold or gave away his paintings. Although from time to time he wandered throughout the Lemko Region, he soon returned to the spot along the wall where he felt best. Strongly tied to the atmosphere of the town of Krynica and the Lemko Region as a whole, Nykyfor considered his paintings to be something natural and obvious. He created for himself, because creativity was a part of his being — it was his very life.

In fact, in the paintings of Nykyfor we can touch the depths of an open, simple, and free spirit, who created with brush and color a world of his own. His paintings are described as naive and primitive in the positive sense of those words. The world which Nykyfor created in works which number about 30,000 has nothing to do with a realistic depiction of nature. Here it is the icon which is the source of the profound variety and particular characteristics of his paintings.

There is a great similarity in the creative principles of Nykyfor's works and the canon of Byzantine iconography. As in the icons, so too in Nykyfor's works is there magic. The icon is not only an image, it is a picture which directs one through pictorial form to the presence of God and itself embodies in part that presence. Similar are the paintings of Nykyfor. They not only reflect the world, they are in part the world they reflect. Even if that world should vanish, it will survive precisely there where Nykyfor created it — in his art.

Nykyfor depicted the Lemko Region — its wondrous, clear, and refreshing sun, its numerous churches, its brightly colored houses, its fairy tales and symbols. These were to remain forever. He also depicted himself as he wished he could be and how he would like to feel — young, distinguished, respected. He painted himself like the saints on icons, seen always with gigantic eyes, seriousness, and grandeur. He also rendered other people in the same way, if he felt they merited such treatment. All his paintings are in fact triumphal and solemn in which a strong internal force is ever present.

It is the power and greatness of Nykyfor's talent which today attracts the world's art critics. Yet while he was outstanding, he still remains a misunderstood phenomenon. This is because it is not possible to understand an individual without knowing the life of the people from whom he or she derived. Nykyfor lived and created as a Lemko, and first and foremost it is necessary to understand his work as a homage to the Lemko Region — a homage in which everything there would remain just as he saw and felt it.

Olena Duc
Uscie Gorlickie, Poland
The following article, written by Antoni Kroh, the curator of the state-supported Regional Ethnographic Museum in Nowy Sącz, Poland, was first published in the Polish journal Polska Sztuka Ludowa (Warsaw, 1985). Kroh is one of a small group of contemporary Poles who sympathize with the current plight of Lemkos living in their midst.—Editor

The museum in Zyndranowa is unique, but not because of its wealth. In reality, it is a modest establishment. What distinguishes Zyndranowa from many other museums in Poland, including famous ones that have funds of several millions at their disposal and that are visited by hundreds of thousands of tourists every year, is the role it performs and the range of social needs it tries to satisfy. For this is a museum greatly needed by both Lemkos and Poles. The swarms of tourists brought by buses to other museums does not visit here, but people seeking the truth about the past and present Lemko Region do come. They come because they need this truth, and they hardly have any other means of finding it.

The museum is modest, because it is completely supported by private funds without any external, financial, or organizational aid. When we realize this fact, and at the same time observe the impact of the museum's work, we will understand how very deserving of respect are the people who brought this establishment to life and who bear the burden of maintaining it.

It seems that the example of the museum in Zyndranowa may be of interest not only to lovers of the Lemko Region, but in general for sociologists of culture, ethnographers, historians, and in particular for proponents of the regional movement and folk culture all over Poland. The latter especially can learn much here.

The village of Zyndranowa lies in the east-central Lemko Region, south of the town of Krosno on the very border with Czechoslovakia and just a few kilometers from the Dukla Pass. An important passage through the Carpathians, the Dukla Pass was once one of the busiest trade routes of the old Polish Republic. Famous markets were held in the nearby town of Dukla, which were also visited by Rusyns traveling from northern Hungary, in other words from what is today the Prešov Region of eastern Slovakia. Thus, the area around the Dukla Pass is a region where contacts between Rusyns from the northern and the southern slopes of the Carpathians were for centuries very close and multi-faceted, exerting a strong influence on folk culture and especially on ethnic self-consciousness. The feeling that the lands on both sides of the mountains constitute a single unit and that its inhabitants are kinsmen was and is continually alive. This was also favoured by circumstances in which the Rusyn population was surrounded by peoples of different languages, religions, cultures — Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians, Jews.

During World Wars I and II, the front rolled through this area many times, since the Dukla Pass constituted a key strategic point. Terrifying struggles took place for control of the pass in which hundreds of thousands of soldiers from different armies, as well as many local people, lost their lives. The infamous "Valley of Death" between the Iwla and the Hyrowa Rivers, one of the largest battlefields in this part of Europe, is located near Zyndranowa. After 1945, the area became almost completely depopulated. First, this was the result of military activities, then of repatriation of part of the population to the Soviet Ukraine, and finally as a consequence of the tragic "Vistula Action" during which the Polish government forcibly removed the remaining Lemko population.

Beginning in the mid-1950s, when Lemkos began to return to these parts, a legend of quite recent origin (yet already deeply rooted in Polish society) arose. This legend spoke of the area as a land belonging to no one, a kind of "Wild West" suitable for romantic experiences and manly adventures in the style of Jack London. The whole area was considered a wasteland with a severe climate, predatory game, and overgrown sites of former forest fires, cemeteries, and mysterious graves. Unfortunately, Polish literary works, films, and newspaper articles, which were too often characterized by a kind of moral color-blindness, contributed to the rise of this superficial, and therefore false, legend. There was even a song in vogue about the Bieszczady Mountains where one could "be a cowboy."

Hence, adventurers, romantics, trappers, restless souls, and common criminals from all over Poland came here, whether for profit, for biding their time, or for colorful self-creation. Polish peasants from the lowlands, generally driven by life's pressures, also settled down here, since for various reasons there was no place for them in their own native regions. But nothing at all grew for them in this foreign mountain climate, so after a few years of drudgery they most often fled. Although there are many commendable exceptions to this sad rule (for instance, the village of Kamianna splendidly managed by its new Polish inhabitants), the general picture is not edifying. In the end, many Poles have passed through the Lemko Region, but not many have remained.

From the beginning, it is only the Lemkos who have considered these parts their home. They have done so without reservations, despite everything and everyone. It may be a home which they did not choose, but one which they carry in their hearts their whole life long. That is how it is. For Lemkos this is Lemko country, for Poles — post-Lemko country. That's the difference.

In this and other respects, the Poles settling down in the Lower Beskyd and Bieszczady ranges were, culturally speaking, a none too active element. Even the mountaineer Poles from Podhala, who came and settled in quite close-knit centers in Banica near Izby, Czarna, Mochnaczka and other villages, and who experienced the least amount of trouble in adapting to their new conditions, even they — relatively speaking — lost in large measure their distinguishing Podhalian characteristics.

On the other hand, the returning Lemkos began their cultural activity almost immediately upon unpacking their bundles. One could see that they considered it an essential element of their existence as a society. Already in the fall of 1954 a folklore ensemble of thirty people, founded and directed by Fedir Goc, came into being at the Solidarity Production Cooperative in Zyndranowa. A spectacle, the "Lemko Wedding" was produced, and in 1955, Polish television recorded a program, "With the Lemkos in Zyndranowa," featuring this ensemble. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, other song and dance groups came into existence in Bielanka, Komancza, Grab,
Olchowiec, Tylawa, and Polany near Dukla. Orthodox church choirs were also active in a few villages. The villages of Bartne, Hanczowa, Konieczna, and Zdynia stood out because of their cultural activity.

Looking at the history of eastern and southern Europe in the nineteenth century, one can see that the energetic cultural activity of a small group of people has more than once provided the beginnings of national consciousness for many modern nations. Precisely in this way the Czechs, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Romanians, and some South Slavic nations began to be transformed. Indeed, the first stages were often modest and the sphere of influence small. For instance, the first Czech awakeners used to gather in one small room, and a saying circulated along the Vltava River in Bohemia that if the roof had collapsed on this room, the further development of modern Czech literature would have been questionable. The Sturites, a group centered around the first Slovak ideologue L'udovít Stur, comprised only a handful of romantic youths, while the advocates of the Rusyn Triad, who laid the foundations of modern Ukrainian culture in Galicia, could also have been counted on the fingers of both hands. Similarly, the Slovenians, called Illyrians at that time, began their modest activity by publishing almanacs and bee-keeping handbooks.

Of course, in mentioning this I do not intend to suggest that the Lemkos' cultural activity can in similar fashion constitute a national consciousness. After all, the processes which I have just recalled took place over a century and a half ago in very different social, political, and governmental conditions. I am only concerned here with drawing attention to the remarkably integrative and representative function of collective cultural activity among regional and ethnic minority groups which desire to protect their identity. For it is well known that cultural activity serves a predominate and integrative function in communities which do not exhibit national aspirations (Podhalian, Tyrolians), but who only wish to preserve their distinct character. It is also well known that local patriotism does not lessen national or state patriotism; quite the contrary, one enriches the other and gives it life.

The East German government, for example, understands this by supporting the Lusation Sorbian cultural movement. Even closer to them, the Lemkos are impressed especially by the example of the Ukrainian Museum at Svidnik in northern Slovakia, which has about 30 employees, a skansen, an icon collection, rich ethnographic collections, and which publishes scholarly and popular works.

In contrast, the Lemkos living in Poland have at present only two extra-religious cultural institutions serving them in a representative and integrative capacity. These are the Lemkovyna Song and Dance Ensemble based in Bielanka (Nowy Sącz district) under their artistic director Jaroslav Trochanov's'kyj, and the Regional Museum of Lemko Culture and War Memorial in Zyndranowa (Krosno district) founded by a group of activists, among whom Pavel Stefanov's'kyj, Michal Dons'kyj, and Fedir Kuzjak were prominent, and whose director is Fedir Goć. In this context, it is interesting to note that Stefanov's'kyj ran a Lemko Regional House in Bielanka for many years, although it has had to struggle to survive. This house is presently inaccessible to tourists and it was decided to move its collections to Zyndranowa as soon as conditions for exhibiting them are provided.

The Lemkovyna Ensemble and Zyndranowa Museum have a common feature which constitutes the source of their strength, and at the same time is the cause of unending troubles, vexations, and a feeling of uncertainty. Namely, they are not supported by state funds (as most other cultural institutions in Poland), but are maintained by a handful of people whose dedication and hard work sometimes creates the impression of hopelessness and other times of heroism. The single driving force behind these people's activities is faithfulness to the Lemko tradition. They are simply fighting desperately for their lives, for their community existence, for their right to group pride. Others may not understand this, but Poles should.

These Lemko institutions, however, are not connected with the so-called vertical structure of culture. The vertical structure is a closed system devised and administered from above, just like health service, for instance. Here everything has its place — hierarchy, budget, work plans, and posts of employment. Everything is foreseen, grasped, and then realized and summed up in reports. This system can successfully tolerate superficial activity and can support it even for an extended period of time, just so long as that activity is properly categorized. But it cannot incorporate into its structure a phenomenon which is not sufficiently named and classified. And, looking at the museum in Zyndranowa and the Lemko cultural movement in general, neither can be classified in official terms.
This is because the Lemkos are not officially recognized as a separate national minority, but are included with the Ukrainian nation. For various reasons, which I will not write about here, this situation does not suit many Lemkos, since they feel strongly about their separateness both from the Ukrainians as well as from the Poles. Although the Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society (USKT), active in Poland, takes into account the cultural needs of the Lemkos (in accordance with its statute), a situation has arisen in which the Lemkos do not enjoy all the conditions necessary for their development within the framework of that society. Simply put, Lemkos do not feel completely at home there. I do not intend to write at length on Lemko-Ukrainian relations in Poland, especially since they have taken on different shades during the last forty years; nevertheless, it is a fact that many Lemko activists have remained outside the Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society. Therefore, the museum in Zyndranowa, operating independently of the Society, is — officially speaking — not a museum of a national minority.

At the same time, it is also not a museum of an ethnographic region, such as Podhale or Orava, since one of the most difficult of Lemko problems is the question of self-definition. Despite their distinct character, Podhalians are Poles, and no one questions this. Some Oravians are Poles at heart, others Slovaks, yet there is no Oravian national problem. On the other hand and for obvious reasons, Lemkos do not consider themselves a part of the Polish nation, whereas belonging to the Ukrainian nation is for them a complicated and often painful issue. Hence it is difficult to treat the Lemko Region exclusively as just another region of Poland. In this sense, the museum in Zyndranowa is not a regional museum, it is something more.

How, then, can this establishment be classified?

When encountering a phenomenon which we do not fully understand and which destroys our established mental patterns, we can approach it in one of the following ways: (1) ignore it and simply not take note of its existence; (2) squeeze it into a compulsory framework, that is, "draw it into" known established patterns; or (3) attempt to destroy and annihilate it. Fedir Goč, one of the founders and the director of the museum from its beginnings, learned perfectly all three of these ways at his own cost during the sixteen years of the museum’s existence. Let us hope that one day he will write down and publish his experiences. It will certainly be an extremely interesting document from which we will learn many surprising things.

But how can one help the museum in Zyndranowa? How can one solve the question of this institution’s further development? I assume it is not necessary to prove that help is indeed necessary. The Lemkos are fellow citizens of Poland and they contribute to the creation of the country’s wealth; hence, they obviously have the right to benefit from this wealth and to watch over their own culture as do all of us. However, the help which is essential will only make sense if it does not disturb the very nature of the museum, that is, its social character.

It seems that the best solution would be the creation of a Society of Friends of the Lemko Museum of Zyndranowa, an organization that would enjoy legal status. Such an organization, which would become the formal owner of the museum (up to now the question of ownership has not been completely resolved), would hire the necessary employees: guides for the tourist season, specialists for conservation work, etc. The activity of such a society should be subsidized by the state, as is usually the case with other cultural establishments. The proposed society of friends should also institute a scientific council and a publishing division. Operating this way would not disturb the social character of the museum and would place it on a professional level by running it in accordance with the principles of modern museology.

Many precedents for such a solution have existed in the past as well as the present. For example, the Jan Kasprzowicz Museum at Harenda in Zakopane belongs to the Jan Kasprzowicz Society. The Fryderyk Chopin Society in Warsaw also owns a museum (aside from other activities), naturally benefiting from state financial aid. As is well-known, the museums founded by the Polish Sightseeing Society, the Polish Tatra Society, and next their successor, the Polish Tourist-Sightseeing Association, have played a considerable role in the history of Polish collectorship. One can multiply the number of such examples. In fact, the Zyndranowa Museum has since 1968 had an advisory board formed with the consent of the local authorities but not recognized as an official body.

It seems obvious that in order for the museum in Zyndranowa to develop, it must obtain a statute and legal status in order to benefit from, among other things, systematic state subsidies. Yet at the same time it must continue to be itself, that is, to preserve its social character and autonomy as a center of information about the past and present Lemko Region, thereby satisfying the cultural needs of the Lemko community in Poland.

If such decisions were made, one could expect that right away the museum collections would increase significantly. News of the birth of a representative Lemko institution would certainly induce the many Lemkos scattered throughout Poland and beyond its boundaries to be generous. We would then be able to see mementos now kept in private homes and shown only to family and close friends — mementos often possessing great historical and emotional value. Our country, ravaged by so many wars and not rich in relics, would have one more active cultural institution to fill that painful gap in Poland’s consciousness, at the same time that it would be a source of proper and long overdue satisfaction to the Lemkos.

At present the museum operates under very modest conditions. It is located on an old, though well-preserved small farm, very few of which remain in the area. (The small farm is entered in the registry of historical monuments by the Custodian of Historical Monuments for the district of Rzeszów, now in Krosno.) The main building, which houses under one roof the living quarters, cow barn, and stable, dates from 1860. An ethnographic exhibition consisting of more than 1,500 items is set up there.

These include a recreated traditional Lemko living room with relics mainly from the turn of the twentieth century. Originally it was a chimneyless cabin; in 1901, a stove with a hood was built in it. Furniture, pictures, utensils, small kitchenware and other elements of old interior furnishings are displayed with respect for their original function, and they create a natural impression that speaks volumes about the life of Lemko farmers several decades ago. One of the chromolithographs, the Heart of the Blessed Mother, has some bullet holes in a few places, providing thereby a discreet and at the same time very expressive symbol of the fate of the Lemkos.
Beyond the living room is a second, smaller room, the so-called “second chyža.” It once served as the chief villager’s office. During the Dukla campaign in World War II, a Soviet general in command of this section of the front was stationed in it. At present one finds there a modest exhibit of costumes, publications on the Lemko Region (including some very rare and valuable printed materials), and a few photographs among which is a youthful portrait of the painter Nykyfor. (See his biography in this issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American). There are also coins, documents, and amateur pictures portraying churches, some no longer in existence, painted by Fedir Kuzjak of Bartne.

The continuation of the ethnographic exhibition is found in neighbouring rooms once used for farming (a stable, threshing-floor, and coach-house). Implements for soil cultivation and cattle raising, and processing of farm and livestock products characteristic of old mountain farms are there. A small exhibit of liturgical utensils and religious objects, at times rescued in dramatic circumstances, also exists. The visitor is particularly impressed by the gripping beauty of an Eastern Christian cross beautifully wrought in iron. The work of peasant artistry, it is bent as if in pain, having fallen from the roof of a burning church in the village of Czeremcha/Ceremcha (Krosno district).

In 1969, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the battle for the Dukla Pass, the museum director Goč installed an exhibit of war souvenirs in the barn on the other side of the yard. This is the second section of the museum in Zyndranowa, where there are Polish, Soviet, and Czechoslovak uniforms (in each of which armies Lemkos fought), rusted arms found to this day in the fields nearby, a few publications, and some pictures. It should be mentioned that the village of Zyndranowa was decorated by President Ludvik Svoboda (Czechoslovak general during World War II) with the Order of the Czechoslovak Red Star for aiding Czechoslovak soldiers during the Dukla campaign.

Objects that once belonged to I. R. Plechov, a soldier in the Soviet Army who dying from his wounds on Suchanja Mountain near Polany left a letter to his family in a bottle, create a particularly strong impression on visitors. The letter was found 25 years later in some brush and brought to the museum. Director Goč sent it to Plechov’s widow in the Soviet Union who in this way discovered only in 1969 where and how her husband had died.

A large plot of land next to the small farm also belongs to the museum. A willow with three trunks grows there. Goč perceived the symbolism, called this place the “corner of brotherhood” (the inscription being in Polish and Lemko), placed a bench under the tree, and on the three branches which join together right near the ground, he mounted tablets which read: Lech, Rus’, Czech. About a dozen steps from the “corner of brotherhood,” a monument several meters in height to the Soviet soldiers fallen in the battles for the Dukla Pass was built by a group of combatants from Poland, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia with the cooperation of the local museum committee and circle of the Society for Polish-Soviet Friendship. War veterans from nearby Slovakia presented carefully chiselled granite tablets in Russian, Polish, and Slovak. This monument no longer exists, and all that remains are the partially damaged tablets and a folder of correspondence. At present, another, much more modest monument is found in this place.

A small obelisk raised in honor of the victims of the Talerhof camp (a place of internment for the Lemkos during World War I) stands between the small farm housing the museum and the monument to the Soviet soldiers. It was first raised in 1936 at Banica near Bartne, a village which ceased to exist after 1947. When a road was built there a few years ago the monument was in danger, so Goč transferred it to Zyndranowa.

A few dozen meters from the museum buildings stands the magnificent new home of the Goč family, pleasing to the eye with its fresh red brick. The home itself is a symbol of the Lemko’s moral strength, their attachment to their native land, their resilience, and their victorious battle with the adversities of fate.

To found a museum, to gather mementos, and to take care of them is a lot of work. However, an even greater task is the arduous welcoming for the last seventeen years of more and more guests — and always with a smile, graciously, unselfishly. The guests vary, from those who only in Zyndranowa discover to their amazement that national minorities actually exist in contemporary Poland, to those who have come from the other side of the globe with tears in their eyes. People who are not free of anti-Lemko attitudes come as well. It is necessary to know how to respond to all of them quietly and with dignity. Many visitors (especially Lemkos from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, the United States, Canada) wish to sit around and talk. Director Goč must find the time and patience for this, precisely at the period — the tourist season — when there is most urgent harvest work in the fields.
Maintenance of the museum costs not only much time and nerves but money as well. Apparently, in 1985, the museum in Zyndranowa is to receive a subsidy from the Ministry of Culture (for the moment, however, this is only a noncommittal rumor). If this becomes reality, it would be the first concrete aid on the part of the government in seventeen years. In the meantime, the museum survives under the self-sacrificing leadership of its director Fedir Goć, who in his “spare time” also sews the folk costumes for the Lemkovyna Ensemble. For all his efforts, Goć is universally recognized by Lemkos throughout Poland, and he has received many official awards and congratulatory letters (ironically more from Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union than Poland) for his activity.

Antoni Kroh
Nowy Sącz, Poland

**DID YOU RETURN THE SURVEY?**

Our last issue contained a survey which, if you have not already completed, we urge you to do so and return at your earliest opportunity. Very preliminary results suggest a unanimous desire for more of just about everything and as well give many helpful suggestions. However, before we make any conclusions, we need to hear from more of you, so please respond as requested. A comprehensive analysis of the responses will be included in the next issue. If first indications hold up, there is a great demand for a national festival and a national association to support the work of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. Like the concept of a Chair of Carpatho-Rusyn Studies, these two ideas will take considerable thought, organization, and energy. They also deserve a thorough airing in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, so please let us know what you think about them and share any ideas you may have for instituting them.

**TRADITIONAL LEMKO DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE**

Lemko villages are mostly situated on low terraces along streams and rivers beyond flood level. The oblong form of the houses and the method of their construction is also linked with the system of land usage. In most villages the land is divided into wide strips that run crosswise through the valley.

In most cases, the houses in the Lemko Region had windows facing the road; that is, their front facade. However, in the far western parts of the region there are villages where the houses stand sidewise to the road. The reason for this was that in these localities there were wider river valleys, making it easier to drive into most of the farmsteads.

The classic type of Lemko dwelling was the rectangular or row house. These are rural village structures in which the farm buildings are built one touching the other, all under the same roof as the house. Such Lemko houses are composed of the dwelling unit — the room inhabited by the family (*chyza*), the entrance passage (*sini*), and the storehouse or pantry (*komora*); followed by the stables or cattle barn (*stajnja*); the threshing barn and grain-storage room (*pelevnja*); and lastly the machinery and wagon barn (*sopa*).
The Soviet Ukrainian writer, Vasyli Zemljak, described a Lemko village with its houses in his novel, Green Mills: “The buildings here were brought together in a long line and served all the needs of the farm — the family dwelling, cowbarn, and grain-storage under one roof with the hayloft above. Wooden double-doors or a gate led to the hay loft, but narrow doors to the entrance passage of the house.” This description actually refers to a village of Lemko settlers who as early as the nineteenth century emigrated from the Prešov Region to Podolia in the western Ukraine, where their descendants remain to this day.

The folk architecture in the Lemko Region has inherited much that is archaic, that is, old building traditions which have been retained but adapted to local conditions, be they geographic, ethnic, or socioeconomic. The houses were most often made of split, half-round fir logs. In far northwestern Transcarpathia (Subcarpathian Rus’), these were very often oak logs. The round side of the split logs formed the exterior, the flat side the interior walls. At the corners the timbers were fitted by overlapping through use of a simple interlock device or a fish-tail joint. Dry forest-moss was packed between the joints of the rounded logs. The roofs were thatched with straw, and the houses usually had two sloping surfaces.

On the exterior, the timbers were rubbed with crude oil, which not only preserved the walls from rot and worms, but even served as a sort of ornamentation. In villages lacking such oil, burnt clay mixed with water and/or linseed oil was used instead. The rounded logs were filled in or packed along the whole length with moss and clay. This “mortar” was then whitewashed, so that the resulting horizontal stripes stood out vividly against the dark oily background of the logs, thereby underlining the structure of the house.

The living space was quite spacious, in contrast to the entrance doors which were usually very low and narrow. Windows in most cases had nine small panes; sometimes two windows were built side by side. Inside the house, the walls were coated with clay and whitewashed with lime or chalk. The ceiling, however, was rubbed with crude oil or with a thick paste of brickdust and linseed oil.

Much attention was given to decorating the exterior walls. For color, white or bright yellow clay was used. Decorations included various ornamental motifs, such as solar signs, sickies, pothooks, angles, the tree of life, braids, and flowers (the basic motif being a pine branch or stem and a flower). Flowers were most often depicted on flat doors. There was also the tradition that a ‘flower’ must have as many stems or twigs as there were members of the family living in the house. When a child was born, another pair of branches was painted underneath. On the big gate-doors, usually birds were painted.

Inside the house, paintings were few. The walls were white-washed with lime and blueing. Sometimes near the window, colorful streaks and dots were painted, as well as around the contour of certain parts of the big stove. These designs were made by those who believed in the magical power of such signs, which allegedly protected everybody who lived in the house from evil.

The designs were executed with a cloth wrapped round a stick, or with a cat hair’s brush. Painting was usually done before important holidays: in spring before Easter; in winter before Christmas; or at other times before ‘holy days’ or monthly festivals. The ornaments were not copies, but al-

The tree of life, a typical design in Lemko home exter-

iors.

ways drawn anew from memory. They were executed mostly by girls and elderly women.

This painting tradition in the Lemko Region began to dis-
appear in the decades after World War II, but thanks to the labor of love carried out by Iryna Dobrjans’ka, one of the organizers of the Lemko Museum in Sanok, Poland and now a researcher at the State Museum of Ethnic Studies and Applied Art of the Soviet Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in Kiev, the tradition has been carefully investigated. Dobrjans’ka has prepared an album of Lemko wall-painting designs, which is preserved today in the Museum of Ukrainian Folk Architecture and Traditional Life in Kiev.

With regard to the layout of the interior, the “mouth” of the stove was turned toward a side wall. The bed was then set between the stove and the side wall. It had a big feather or down mattress and above it hung a pegged board for hanging Sunday clothes. In certain localities, on the side wall at the head of the bed there was a shelf for dishes. Along the side and front walls, there were benches. Between them would be placed a high table or a chest which was always covered with a white towel which served for covering bread.

Various additions could be built onto the row house — a closed porch for hay and straw and for various garden or farm tools, a pigpen, a fold for sheep, and a stall for the horse.

These, then, were the general characteristics of traditional Lemko rural domestic architecture. And despite the impact of modern building techniques and styles, it is interesting to note that the old Lemko building customs are preserved to this day in the far northwestern corner of Soviet Transcarpathia (the Perecyn and Velykyj Bereznyj districts), in the Prešov Region of northeastern Czechoslovakia, and, of course, in the Lemko Region of southeastern Poland.

Archyp Danyliuk
L'viv, USSR
RECENT PUBLICATIONS 1983 (continued)


Myšanyč, Oleksa, “Slovacko-ukrajinski literaturni sv’jažky XI-XVIII st.” (Slovak-Ukrainian Literary Relations From the 11th to 18th Centuries), Slavica Slovaca, XVIII, 4 (Bratislava, 1983), pp. 373-383.


OUR FRONT COVER

Nykyfor being greeted in a Lemko home.
sylvania, demonstrated his skill at iconography. Ken Kochis of Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, showed his artistry at wood carving. John Righetti of Avalon, Pennsylvania, showed off his talent as a pysanky artist. Traditional Carpatho-Rusyn woodburning techniques and embroidery skills were shown by Bonnie Balas of Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

These events and displays were a credit to the Carpatho-Rusyn community and were praised for their professionalism and the skill and enthusiasm of the performers. What was particularly gratifying, was the cooperation, support, and high attendance by members of both the Orthodox and Catholic Carpatho-Rusyn parishes of the Pittsburgh area.

Minneapolis, Minnesota. On June 10, 1987, the priests, deacons, parish president and others of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral of Minneapolis were guests of Roman Catholic Archbishop John Roach, at his St. Paul, Minnesota residence. The Archbishop had extended the invitation for the purpose of congratulating the parish on the occasion of its 100th anniversary, but the event had significance beyond that.

In 1889, then Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. Paul, John Ireland, received the Greek Catholic priest Alexis Toth for the purpose of reviewing his credentials prior to allowing him to assume his position as pastor of St. Mary's Church. That meeting, which ended in acrimony, initiated a series of events which eventually resulted in not only the Reverend Toth and the parishioners of St. Mary's turning to the Orthodox faith, but led, in turn, to many, many more Carpatho-Rusyn parishes making the same decision.

In reference to the infamous 1889 meeting, Archbishop Roach said, "I have a sense of regret that the outcome of that meeting was a replication on the local level of the Great Schism that occurred between the Eastern and Western churches in 1054." He went on to say, "It is appropriate that we from the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral should gather to commemorate the foundation of St. Mary's parish. We should lament the harshness that existed between our forebears and the division that resulted from it."

The Reverend Thaddeus Wojcik, the present pastor of St. Mary's, expressed his wish "...that all Christians who hear of our meeting will be more aware that God can overcome former hostilities and begin to heal ancient wounds." The Reverend Wojcik also invited Archbishop Roach to come to St. Mary's to meet with Metropolitan Theodosius and Bishop Boris in October, when the main events in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Mary's will take place.

Mercer, Pennsylvania. Sunday, June 14, 1987, was the tenth anniversary of the establishment of Camp Nazareth, the beautiful camping and retreat facility of the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. In celebration of the occasion, the Slavjane Folk Art Ensemble performed a one hour Carpatho-Rusyn cultural salute. Present for the morning liturgy, speeches, and the day's festivities was His Grace, Bishop Nicholas Smisko.

West Mifflin, Pennsylvania. June 25, 1987, the day of the 1987 Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Day at Kennywood Amusement Park, featured a picnic and several cultural festivities including a performance by the choir of St. Nicholas Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church of Homestead, Pennsylvania. The choir performed liturgical and folk selections under the direction of David Ruschak. Jerry Jumba led a Carpatho-Rusyn sing-a-long. Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Day is sponsored by the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of Johnstown and in attendance for the celebration was His Grace, Bishop Nicholas Smisko along with members of the clergy.

FROM OUR READERS

To the Editor:

I am very pleased with my copy of Rusyn Easter Eggs from Eastern Slovakia by Pavlo Markovych. The tradition of decorating and coloring Easter eggs with a pin head for our Easter baskets has been handed down to the third generation in our family, but we didn't know what the various symbols etc. meant.

My sisters and I were fortunate enough to visit the town of Svetlice, Czechoslovakia in 1980, where our parents and grandparents were born and we're proud of our heritage and ethnic background.

Enclosed is a check for $100 for four more copies of the book for members of my family who were as thrilled as I was with the wealth of information in the book.

Mrs. J. Stachniky
Hammond, Indiana

To the Editor:

I would like to see more on Carpatho-Rusyns in the Orthodox churches in particular the reasons and methods for the Russification of the first Uniates to return to Orthodoxy in the Russian Metropolia.

John Righetti
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania