

CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN^o

A Newsletter on Carpatho-Rusyn Ethnic Heritage



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FROM THE EDITOR

We introduced 1987 to you as our newsletter's "Year of the Lemko." This was done not only because it is the fortieth anniversary of the forced removal of the Lemkos from their Carpathian homeland, but also because it would provide an opportunity to tell you about the present day hopes for a Lemko revival in Poland and to draw from their energy some vitality for ourselves in America.

This issue's feature article by Jaroslav Hunka, "The Lemkos Today," tells us from the heart what the lot of Poland's Lemkos is at present and what their hopes are for tomorrow. More significantly for us, and in conjunction with recent events in the United States, it shows us where we in our complacency have failed, not only our brothers and sisters in Poland, but also ourselves.

There is in Poland an outstanding Lemko folk ensemble, Lemkovyna. Although it was founded some fifteen years ago, it has repeatedly been denied an administratively separate existence, so today it functions reluctantly under the auspices of Poland's Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society (USKT). This fall, the Lemkovyna Folk Ensemble traveled to Canada and the United States for a month long concert tour. Jaroslav Hunka tells how Lemkovyna's first performance on television in Poland had made his parents cry since they thought that the war had wiped out their heritage. From all reports, the recent tour had the same effect on many in North America — they were performances of which we could be proud.

Yet this tour was also a kind of indictment of the Rusyn community in America. This is because Lemkovyna, a folk ensemble of Rusyns, not Ukrainians, was sponsored in the United States by the Ukrainian National Association and in Canada by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee. This did not occur out of any malevolence on the part of the Ukrainian community. It occurred because over the past fifty years our Rusyn institutions, in particular our fraternal organizations who should be in the forefront of Rusyn cultural activity, have forgotten the culture and heritage that built them and have abandoned their links with the Lemko and other Rusyn communities in Europe. Instead of celebrating their Rusyn heritage and using that heritage to build their institutions and safeguard their communities, they have gone bowling. Because of that we all have paid a price. That price is our birthright.

In the Lemkovyna Folk Ensemble we have not only an outstanding group of Lemko Rusyn patriots and folk performers, we also have a unique opportunity to show the world that the Rusyn people are alive in both America and Europe and that they have a cultural and ethnic heritage to be shared and admired. But because of our complacency, we have not seized that and similar opportunities. For the most part we have not even recognized them. Instead, our people have allowed for a vacuum into which the Ukrainians have stepped. It is high time we realized, as Hunka tells us, that we are an endangered species, and that steps must be taken to assure our survival. In Poland, because of the

political situation, our Lemko brothers and sisters must look to the government, if not for help and for approval, at least for neutrality. In America, the only obstacles we Rusyns face are an organized and ambitious Ukrainian community, our own churches and fraternal organizations whose interests are elsewhere, and our own lackadaisical selves.

In the headlong rush to become successful in America, we have left behind what makes us unique, that priceless legacy of our parents, grandparents, and of the many generations of Rusyns that passed before us. We must once again recognize that to be a whole people we need a vital Rusyn heritage. This heritage is at risk today perhaps more than ever before, and unless we guard it, nurture it, and promote it, we cannot say it was lost or stolen. We ourselves are simply abandoning it. And with its abandonment we betray the trust of those of our people who suffered so much in the past to preserve the Rusyn heritage in America, and who still today struggle on behalf of it in Europe.

In the early decades of this century, our Rusyn people came to grips with what for them was the Ukrainian problem. The result was not so much a division, but a recognition of the fact that we are a distinct and separate people. This led to the creation of the parallel institutions that still today serve our respective Rusyn and Ukrainian communities. Rightly or wrongly, our Rusyn churches and fraternal organizations thought that they had won not just a great victory, but the war, and they retired from the battlefield. In the subsequent decades our people turned over the care of their Rusyn identity to their fraternal organizations and churches, and year after year that identity languished and wasted away as the energies of our leaders were sapped first by internecine struggles and then by fiscal problems and recreational concerns for the fraternal organizations, or by the desire to accommodate an ethnically diverse faithful for the churches. In the process, many forgot that we were Rusyns and that our devotion to each other and to our heritage was the reason for the existence of these institutions in the first place.

Now we are at a stage in our existence as a people where we must take advantage of opportunities in changing times. The Ukrainians have always been and still are with us, and theirs is an organized, attentive, and vital community. We must face the fact that pressure from the Ukrainian community will probably continue. On the other hand, there is a changing political situation in Eastern Europe, and new opportunities for our people to live in their homeland as Rusyns may soon arise. Regardless of the fate of *glasnost* in the Soviet Union, we do know that in Poland the Lemko Rusyns have awakened and we must be prepared to lend a hand.

The question, as always, is who will do what needs to be done? And the answer, as always, is — look in the mirror. If our Rusyn heritage is worthy of being saved, it can only be saved by you. It can be done. If the Lemko Rusyns, the ordinary ones, can claim their place in Poland, surely we must help them, and by doing so, we will do no less than help ourselves.

IVAN RUSENKO (1890-1960)

Lemkos still call him "the teacher," and indeed he was a teacher of the people, an ideological leader, and an awakener of Lemko patriotism and self identity. He was also the "most Lemko" of poets, who used superbly the simple Lemko language that blossomed from his pen. Rusenko fully expressed the problems of Lemko life, describing "what hurts" and "what cheers." He could warm the Lemko heart or chide it for misbehavior like a good and wise teacher.

Ivan Rusenko was born on August 15, 1890, into a poor peasant family in the Lemko Region village of Krasna (Krosno district) in the historic Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia. After finishing secondary school (*gymnasium*) at Nowy Sącz in 1913, he was conscripted into the Austrian imperial army. During World War I, he fought on the Serbian and Italian fronts, then in 1918 returned to his native village in what by then was Poland. After trying unsuccessfully for many years to obtain a position as a teacher to Lemko children, he finally had to accept a post in the Polish village of Lutczy where he lived for 21 years. At the close of World War II and the initial phase of the resettlement of Lemkos that began in 1945, Rusenko was forced to emigrate to the Soviet Ukraine, settling in the village of Korolivka in the far southeastern corner of the old province of Galicia. There he continued to teach in elementary school. However, he was deeply affected by the separation from his native Lemko Region as evident in the tragic and nostalgic tone of his poetry written until the time of his death on August 10, 1960.

Rusenko's main contribution to Lemko culture was based on his ability to reach the common Lemko whom he knew would be sensitive to the sincerity and simplicity with which such emotions are expressed in his poetry. He wrote exclusively in Lemko dialect and created poetic images of a homeland toward which he felt a deep filial attachment. His poetry helped to teach his fellow Lemkos similar attitudes.

*Ja rodyvsja tvoim synom — dolja moja bidna
Y ljublju tja Lemkovyno, moja maty ridna
Bo cym hoden pozabyty našu hirsku krasu
Y smereký y poljaný, de sja uci pasut.*

I was born your son and my fate is to be poor
Yet I love you, oh Lemko region, my motherland
For how can I forget the beauty of our mountains
The evergreen trees, and the pastures where the
sheep graze.

Throughout his writings Rusenko's main purpose was to teach Lemkos the value of their native heritage from which they could draw to become honest, industrious, good-natured, educated, and well-integrated individuals. The poet was also not averse to using satire, often in the form of caricature. Like his lyrical verses, his satire was presented in a manner that clearly characterized the subject, expressed personal inter-relations, and mocked typical traits. Rusenko's fine character types — the grandfather, the head of the household, the herdsman, the priest — all seem to be taken directly from a pre-World War I Lemko environment. Such satire not only poked fun at negative phenomena in Lemko life, it also went directly to the heart of the matter:

*Pan kerovnyk školy
Ucyt našy dity
Pol'su šanuvaty
Rus' nenavydity*



The school director
Teaches our children
To praise Poland
And hate Rus'.

Anxious about the fate of his people and tireless in revealing life's truths, Rusenko reacted bitterly to the injustice suffered by the Lemkos and to Polish prejudice which he personally experienced many times. Yet, as a teacher and spiritual leader he could not become pessimistic — he had to remain both a consoler and an awakener:

*Ne vřdusyly nas vsich katý
Y ne vyřsaly nam krov!
Jak byly našy Karpatý
Tak budut vo vik-vikov!*

The executioners have not crushed all of us
Nor sucked out all of our blood
Just as our Carpathians have been
So will they remain forever and ever!

The sadness of Rusenko's last poems reflect a dampening of the strength and vigour that had earlier characterized this tireless agitator. In the end, he saw how his hopes had come to naught, how his people were driven from their homes, and how they were scattered throughout the world: *Moja Otcyžna Lemkovyna zaraz za Sanom, jak za plotom/ Lem nja ne pustjat bez pašportu, zahorodyly bramu drotom* (My Lemko fatherland is beyond the San river, as if on the other side of a fence/ Only they don't let me go there without a passport, having closed the gate with barbed wire). While Rusenko may have met a melancholic and unhappy ending, his verse still lives. For Lemkos in Poland today, as for Lemkos during his lifetime, Rusenko's message continues to be both relevant and inspiring.

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THE LEMKOS TODAY

This article was published in 1985 in Warsaw, Poland as a booklet in a Polish-language series intended to provide background information for guides leading tourist and hiking trips in the Carpathian ranges (Lower Beskyds and Bieszczady) of southeastern Poland. The author's name, Jaroslav Hunka, is a pseudonym for a representative of that generation of Lemkos born and raised after World War II in the so-called "Recovered Lands" along the western and northwestern borders of Poland, where Lemkos were forcibly resettled in 1947. Therefore, when the author refers to "the West," he means the western part of Poland.

For certain passages or phrases, we have added explanatory notes in brackets. Passages or phrases within parentheses appear as such in the original text. — Editor

I do not remember at all when I learned that I was a Lemko. We lived in the country, somehow off the beaten track. I was three, perhaps four years old when we, my sister and I, came into contact with a neighborhood boy by the name of Leszek. We were surprised and amazed that he used different names than we did for some objects. In spite of this, we understood each other fairly well, and those differences did not hinder us at all when we played. This idyll was shortlived, however, for when I was already five we moved to a small town, and it was only there that I became aware, rather quickly, of my "otherness." I remember how the children laughed when I called my father *njanju* [Rusyn for daddy] from the yard.

I began to feel ashamed . . .
Then I learned to be afraid.

We were alone in the town. Father forbade us from using *njanju* and introduced *tato* [the Ukrainian word for daddy]. The latter has remained with us to this day. And today it is precisely the one that I am ashamed of!

I have travelled a great road in order, years later, to return at last to my point of departure. What kind of road has been travelled by my nation which also, I think, is returning to this point?

For a very long time I knew nothing about ourselves. At home they said that we were Lemkos simply in the ethnic sense, yet at the same time there prevailed a strange sort of attraction to Rus' (as a whole) which automatically spread to us, the children. Father sometimes said that he used to give his nationality as Rusyn.

Meanwhile, I had to learn Russian in basically the same way as my fellow pupils [in Polish schools]. I thought at the time, like all Poles probably, that a Rusyn (or Rusnak, as father said) was the same as a Russian.

I imbibed a love for the mountains almost along "with my mother's milk," and although I have been living "in the West" since birth, I regard myself as a mountain man. Incidentally, the shortest and until recently the most accurate definition

ran: "Lemkos — a tribe of Rusyn mountain people."

In time we learned how we had been resettled (for a long time yet we did not know why and our parents scarcely knew either), and how after World War II gangs roamed and — despite what was said in school about the [postwar] "after-glow" in the Bieszczady Mountains — the gangs in our area (western Lemko Region) were Polish. They robbed people and sometimes they beat them horribly.

In the winter of 1946-1947, my father, showing uncommon courage, went alone at night without any weapons in pursuit of an armed gang through snow- and forest-covered mountains, and he discovered from which village and from which houses came the people who had robbed my future mother of her last cow. We also heard from mother of how wisely and energetically father managed his farm after the war, and of his hopes and dreams for the development of his village and region.

Here, in the West, father could never adapt to life in his new circumstances. In his contacts with Poles he proved to be pliant, not resistant to conflicts, and gullible. Terribly gullible! He didn't cope at all. What can one say? Grown trees can't be replanted . . .

At the same time, he was quite well-read and had a broad general knowledge. For a long time he was my alpha and omega, yet his information on the subject of Rus' or the history of the Lemkos did not convince me very much. Sometimes he told us that the Lemkos once lived farther west and north, as far as Cracow. Stary Sącz was then called "Stary Sutek" and Nowy Sącz — "Novy Sutek." "Sutek" supposedly meant the place where two rivers flowed together (from the verb: *sutikaly*). In the case of Stary Sącz, the rivers were the Dunajec and the Poprad, and of Nowy Sącz, the Dunajec and the Kamienica. It was quite a logical explanation, but armed with history school books I did not believe it at all. How surprised I was when, searching (much later) for my roots, I came upon these same theories in important sources which father had no way of knowing, since they had not yet been published.

It appears from them that we come from the tribe of White Croats, whose nucleus of settlement was located along the upper Vistula river, with its center in the vicinity of Cracow. The vast majority of this tribe resettled in the Balkans during the first half of the seventh century. In the following centuries, the remaining Croats were pushed into the inaccessible mountains and were partially assimilated by neighboring tribes. As a result of this process, there followed a severing of Croatian tribal territory in the vicinity of the Moravian Gate [a mountain pass in northern Moravia, Czechoslovakia]. By the tenth century, two branches of this tribe already existed: the western branch — in the Elbe River basin as far as the Lser River [that is, Lusatia, in present-day East Germany], whose existence is confirmed by Czech sources; and the eastern branch — from the Raba River to the sources of the Prut and Seret [that is, Galicia, in present day western Ukraine] mentioned, in turn, in Rusyn sources. The western, lesser, part vanished without a trace, while the eastern part, incorporated into Rus', preserved itself in large measure, revealing until today a distinct cultural and linguistic character, despite accepting the name of Rusyns.

At the time I felt like the speaker in [the Lemko writer] Pavel Stefanovskij's poem: "... And believe me, I found the obliterated traces ..."

Along my journey, as it were, I came to know the official [Polish] theory proclaiming the Vlach (by then the Vlach-Rusyn) origin of the Lemkos, who were supposed to have wandered into the Beskyd Mountains in the sixteenth or, at the earliest, the fifteenth century. On the other hand, there does exist proof that the Lemkos lived in the Beskyds already in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; in other words, two centuries earlier than the [Polish] theory allows. In my opinion the [Polish] theory is made to supplement the existing state of affairs by suggesting that [the king of Poland], Casimir the Great (reigned 1330-1370) occupied ethnically Polish territories in 1344 and then settled Vlachs and Rusyns there.

The Ukrainian theory also has a few holes. According to it, we are simply Ukrainians who have been living in the Beskyd Mountains since time immemorial, and that our linguistic differences originate in the fact that we succumbed to Polish influences.

Well, we have without a doubt also succumbed to Polish influences. But with regard to language they were, in my opinion, above all Rusyn influences (or Ukrainian influences, if you use contemporary nomenclature). And it is precisely these influences which explain the fact that in the eastern Lemko Region and along the Lemko-Bojko borderland, the accent begins to become mobile, while at the same time the Lemkos in [the Prešov Region of] Slovakia have their accent fixed on the penultimate syllable despite the lack of contact with Poles! The Polonisms or Slovakisms cited by researchers in the Lemko language may just as well have come from tribal times when they entered into the framework of Old Church Slavonic, a common language for very many tribes, and that they disappeared or became transformed in other [Slavic] languages while they were preserved in Lemko and Polish or in Lemko and Slovak.

Either way, whosever influences they were, and however strong they were, they were not so important as to liquidate the consciousness of our distinct character. In this regard, an essential element was the fact that after World War II, the Lemko Region did not find itself within the borders of the Soviet Ukraine. If we were officially recognized as Ukrainians, we would have had no choice. Of course, I do not wish to say that scattering us throughout Poland was such a great fortune. Quite the contrary. Since the Union of Brest of 1596, [dispersion] has been our greatest misfortune. Nevertheless, we have the possibility (albeit very small) of choosing our own path. The present state of affairs has in the end determined this choice.

Returning to the point, however, I believe that our theory is the clearest, and that it explains in a satisfactory manner the problems associated with the distinct character of Lemkos. The matter will obviously demand thorough study and linguistic analyses, but it is interesting inasmuch as we ourselves, the Lemkos, will do this. After all, our diaspora has its good side as well. We presently have at our disposal, as never before in history, an enormous intellectual potential.

The Lemkos are eager for learning. It seems that on the average they are more educated than the Poles. Moreover, this can be explained by their inferiority complex and desire to compensate for it precisely through education. Probably all minority groups have such a tendency; hence, we find many great people in Polish history with foreign-sounding names. In any case, in those villages (three in number) where we checked, the Lemkos were better educated on the whole. Incomplete data from two other small towns seems to confirm this fact as well.

Assuming that we descend from the White Croats, the history of our people reaches back to the fifth century, when "through the Carpathian mountain passes and the Moravian Gate, the Dulebian, Serbian, and Croatian peoples wandered ... southward, having inhabited up to then the lands on the upper Bug, Dniester and Vistula Rivers." (Jerzy Skowronek et al., *History of the Southern and Western Slavs*, Warsaw, 1977, p. 19). Fifteen centuries of history — probably reason enough to be proud? And this is precisely how I began to be proud of my ancestry.

Meanwhile, the children of my parents were growing up. I began "frequenting" dances, parties, and discotheques. At home I was never told outright, "Don't associate with a Polish girl." Yet on such occasions I always saw a hidden tension and disquiet in my mother's eyes. Father kept silent and did not even look at me, and yet I knew!

Don't go there, don't go, DON'T GO!!! Those words hung, almost sounded, in the air. But I did go, laughing — I won't marry a Polish girl after all — that's obvious. They should trust me.

I understood that they should not have been so trusting when my brothers began to associate with Polish girls. "I can't be sorry enough," my mother once told me, "that I never intruded into your personal affairs. At least then I wouldn't hold it against myself."

I will never forget that! My parents' faces and eyes drawn with pain. Their eyes which expressed amazement as well as pain. "After all, it can't be true!!!"

But it was true.

Sometimes it happened that I went to so-called "Ukrainian dances" (organized by the USKT — the Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society), at which the people present easily numbered more than ninety percent Lemkos. On those occasions, I received a blessing [from my parents], not expressed in words, but given through a glance, gesture, smile, and totally joyful atmosphere at home. Yet at the same time, it is interesting that associating with Ukrainians is almost equally unfavourably regarded, although Lemko parents are not afraid of this. Ukrainianization is completely unattractive for young Lemkos.

It seems that Ukrainian activists were severely disappointed in their politics toward us. Lemkos were lured into cooperating after 1956 with promises of a broad autonomy within the framework of the USKT which was being created just

then. They were given control over a section of that society's newspaper, *Naše slovo*, and that section was called the *Lemkivs'ke slovo*. In the central administration of the USKT, whose members included quite a number of Lemkos, a Lemko committee was created. However, the Lemkos were expelled rather quickly from the management board; the Lemko committee was dissolved; and the *Lemkivs'ke slovo* section was reduced to a "Lemko Page," (*Lemkivs'ka storona*), which at present is Lemko in name only. This means that although Lemkos are still being written about, it is now most often in Ukrainian.

In the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, a network of schools was established with Ukrainian as the language of instruction. However, in Lemko communities this initiative fizzled out after a few years. The Ukrainian attempt, not the first in history, was a flash in the pan. Nevertheless, the Ukrainianization of *Naše slovo* persisted as if nothing happened. And it still persists. The Ukrainian activists certainly assumed that the Lemkos, wishing to avoid Polonization, would have to become Ukrainianized, since in the final analysis the Ukrainian language is much closer to Lemko than is Polish.

This is a mistaken assumption. Lemkos are still able to be themselves, and if they are now losing their national character, it is precisely through Polonization! The fact that it is the Polish language which is closer to the young generation was not taken into account. All of us know it perfectly, in contrast to Ukrainian, if only because we received our entire education in Polish. In addition, a very hostile attitude towards Ukrainians is prevalent in Poland (related as it is to the loss of "Polish" Lwów and the postwar "afterglow in the Bieszczady Mountains"). So why should we have to become Ukrainianized, especially since neither we nor our ancestors ever regarded ourselves as Ukrainian? Ultimately there is no one logical reason, no incentive, no attraction, or no convenience in becoming Ukrainian. For this reason, our parents do not even think of fearing Ukrainianization.

To tell the truth, we really have only one honourable, though inconvenient, way out: to continue being ourselves!

Our parents also wish as their salvation that we take Lemkos for our lifelong partners. Normally, this would be the most pleasant and convenient solution. Most often parents exert the following kind of pressure on their children: "She can be whomever you like, so long as she's a Lemko." Yet at the same time, they create no conditions for their offspring to help fulfill such wishful thinking (generally you will not find a Lemko girl for miles). On the whole, Polish girls are more enterprising in this respect and more active in affairs of the heart than are Lemko girls. The situation is similar with Lemko boys. Too often they are not nearly aggressive enough in comparison with their Polish peers, even though the [geographic] dispersal of our youth demands much, much more "aggressiveness" and courting on their part. In effect, parental pressure on the young people mentioned above produces the exact opposite. Young people put possible candidates "under the microscope" in the fear that he/she is a "defective item," and they will find fault with anything.

"First, let it be someone whom I like and (very important)

whom I will pick out myself, and only later, please Lord, may she be a Lemko."

How many times have I experienced something similar, falling in love with my Annas. Through some strange coincidence, I have almost always taken a liking to Annas.

Where are you, my Anna?

The name itself is extremely dear to me. It is the most beautiful one in the world. For me it is synonymous with feminine beauty, wisdom, and goodness. I recently drew a portrait of E., but again Anna appeared on the page.

Oh, Anna, Anna . . . If only you did not have to be a Lemko.

How strong the national barrier continues to be. Then there exists still another, almost equally strong barrier among Lemkos themselves, which divides them into two enemy groups. This is the denominational barrier.

"You know," said Olja, a mathematics student, to me recently, "'Caesar' has stopped seeing me since I told him that I was Orthodox." "What a fool," I thought, and I began to reflect upon this great misfortune of ours. So few in number, scattered around the world, and we are still divided into Uniates and Orthodox.

The Union of Brest of 1596, introduced as it was by subterfuge and force, is producing its terrible fruits to this very day. It was probably an act of Satan himself dressed in Jesuit robes. After all, there is only one God and "one Lemko Region above us."

Here in the West is a town in and around which many Lemkos live. There is also a clearly delineated denominational division. The Orthodox have a magnificent church comparable to a cathedral — formerly a Protestant church not wanted by the Poles after the war since they occupied a small Catholic church nearby. The Uniates also use this [smaller Polish] church, although they find themselves in the position of beggars having to put up with various caprices of the landlords. For instance, there have been times when Poles have chased them right out of the church, saying: "What are you looking for here, Lemkos, when two hundred meters away you have your Lemko [Orthodox] church?" Tasteless "jokes" were played on them as well, but our Lemkos bore them with a humility that sometimes bordered on a lack of dignity.

My ears burn whenever I think about it. Why? Because this is my nation about which I should like to be able to be proud. It is interesting that the Poles have greater respect for Orthodox Lemkos and even devote a fair amount of attention to them in their mass media. The well-known saying should obviously be quoted here: "The black man did his thing, the black man can leave." Hence, the Uniate is no longer of any use to anybody, least of all to those who created the Union . . .

Come to us brothers. To our Orthodox Church. Don't let yourselves be knocked around from corner to corner. Nobody will speak badly of you or scowl at you. Quite the contrary. Tears would well up in the eyes of many of us. Tears of emotion and joy. After all, you are the blood of our blood, the other half of our nation.



The Lemkovyna Folk Ensemble performing in Sanok, Poland, 1982.

Come, brothers. It will be better and happier for us together. Easier to overcome our difficulties. No, we don't want to draw you into Orthodoxy. You can even be Muslims if it's what you want, but you are first of all Lemkos, and aside from us, aside from ourselves, we have no one . . .

Among the older Uniate Lemkos there is such a strong dislike of the Orthodox, and if that is difficult to justify, it is just as hard to imagine what could be done to change the situation. However, something is beginning to happen among the youth. Young people are beginning to talk among themselves and are coming to the conclusion that this religious division is simply idiotic. Religion is beginning to be a private matter, while Lemko ancestry is becoming a matter of priority. These first swallows heralding the "coming end of our stupidity" delight us to no end. I think the time is not far off when Uniates and Orthodox will work arm and arm in the field of national culture and the preservation of tradition in order to rescue our folklore and the remains of our material culture. Until now such activity has (with a few laudable exceptions) rested almost exclusively on the shoulders of the Orthodox. From now on, however, this will simply be our common, national concern. For at this moment Lemkos no longer "fit in" with any other nationality, and however one might try to give it a formal name, if they are not yet a nationality, they certainly are an ethnic group making great strides toward attaining a consciousness that they *are* a nationality.

Most certainly we are not Russians, nor Belorussians, neither are we nor do we wish to be Ukrainians. Rusyns, in the sense of a nationality that once inhabited Rus', no longer exist, because Rus' doesn't exist either! (Nor did we realize that Rusyns called themselves by a different name.) However, at our present stage of development, we definitely belong

to the same group as the East Slavic nationalities which, along with the others, derives from the historical context of the Rusyns? This, unfortunately, is a result of our geographical situation and, so to speak, historico-political processes. Denial of, or insensitivity towards, this process leads to a separation from Lemko reality.

It was perhaps a year ago that the following people were sitting around and chatting. There was Nina, whom the authorities did not want to register by that name (since it wasn't in the Polish calendar) and who therefore had a different one on her identity card; Olja (with the same name on her card); Kasia (her name was in the calendar); a few Janeks, Wlo-deks, and others. I don't remember all of them. They were students and graduates of higher institutions of learning. Some could not speak Lemko at all. Also, they knew rather little about themselves. But today these same people form a strong group with a Lemko national consciousness. In consultation with Polish cultural and educational activists, the group wants to form a Lemko folklore ensemble in Wroclaw, to publish a Lemko song-book, and it dreams of producing a dictionary of the Lemko language. This is a true mark of the rate of change occurring in the national consciousness of Lemko youth.

At one of the social meetings of this group, there appeared a young Ukrainian who was notably ill-disposed towards so-called "Lemko separatism." To his question, "Why can't the Lemko question be an internal matter of the USKT?," he received the answer: "Because for the USKT there is no question at all!!!" Lemkos are simply Ukrainians and there is nothing more to be said.

However, if the matter is not mentioned, this does not mean it does not exist. Ukrainians refuse to think about any

sort of Lemko autonomy within the framework of the USKT, stating that this is separatism and a weakening of an already weak Ukrainian community in Poland. They also oppose all attempts at creating some kind of separate "Lemko Society." To a certain extent, I can understand them. They have their own interests with regard to Lemkos. However, I cannot at all understand the Poles, who have undermined repeated attempts at creating a "Society for Supporters of Lemko Culture." Is this not strange in light of the arguments used by the Ukrainians? Could it be a fear of some territorial revindication? If so, it is without foundation. Lemkos have already put down roots in their new places of habitation, and they are not even thinking of returning to the Beskyd Mountains. This is because for the most part younger Lemkos are neither shepherds nor farmers. What would they do there?

Those Lemkos who are scattered throughout Poland are slowly succumbing to assimilation (as it is so nicely called, isn't it?). But is it not high time for Polish society to take the Lemkos under their protection? Why, endangered species of animals and even plants are being protected. And all we want is the possibility of legal activity. Lemkos have always been loyal to the Polish state and apolitical. In any case, there is no wiser path for a national minority than political neutrality.

It is sad to look at those Lemkos who choose the "undignified but convenient" way out. They are afraid of their own shadows! They change their first and last names (like one man who had changed his name twice, to Bazyli and Wacław, although Poles still called him Vasy!). They no longer speak Lemko even at home. They are also teaching their children only Polish, for which, however, they achieve the exact opposite of what they wish. In the end, Poles despise them instead of respecting them (always mindful of their own several million strong Polish diaspora abroad which similarly should preserve its national identity within a foreign environment). At the same time, fellow Lemkos look down with pity on those who are so desperately trying to become Polish. Couples who are in such mixed Polish-Lemko marriages are isolated from both groups; hence they are attempting to create social groups of "mixed people," who seem to think they are "being assimilated." Yet, at times the Lemko speech of their parents is heard and it grates unpleasantly. It could be at a baptism party, where hearing a Lemko song will gnaw at one's insides. At the same time, the pain of guilt from trying to run from one's own culture will arise and then be soothed by drowning in alcohol.

We have experienced various high and low points in the course of history, yet we have not completely dissolved into any one of the elements surrounding us. For certain, our borderland situation at the meeting place of three peoples, Rusyn, Polish and Slovak, and along the boundary of the East and West Slavic language groups, has had an enormous significance. Our neighbours' influences have seemingly pressed in upon us together. Nonetheless, it is difficult to resist the impression that something valuable still lies in this quiet, peaceful, and happy people wracked by the stormy winds of history, yet always managing to survive unbroken. After every storm, wherever it may be, someone

seems to rise and begin to look around. Where are our own people? Is there anyone still left?

Someone is still left!!!

Here rise the "young granite ranks."

I remember how my parents cried when they watched the Lemkovyna Song and Dance Ensemble on television. "Dear God, after the war we thought that everything was finished, that we would no longer hear the Lemko tongue, that we would disappear completely in five or ten years."

However, with a most admirable stubbornness and a desperate hopelessness that flies in the face of all logic, these people taught their children the Lemko language. They transmitted to us all that they knew and whenever they had a moment of rest.

GLORY TO YOU, FATHER AND MOTHER.

Your hearts will forever shine for me like road signs on the road from which I shall never stray!

Jaroslav Hunka

P.S. If someone should conclude from what was said above that Lemkos "do not like" Ukrainians, this would be an error. Even if one knows only a bit of history, it is difficult not to like and respect Ukrainians, whose songs are well-known and loved by us. On the other hand, we *do not like* people who, ascribing to themselves the right to exist, deny us the same right!

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The Lemko question is not without controversy. Its many dimensions elicit opposing points of view that are often as passionate, strongly held, and forcefully presented as those of you have just read. The moving essay you have just read, by Jaroslav Hunka, presents but one viewpoint of Lemko history, their present condition in Poland, and their prospects and aspirations for the future. In keeping with our long standing policy of presenting all sides of the controversial subjects we air in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, our next newsletter (Spring 1988) will bring to you other viewpoints on the issues raised by Jaroslav Hunka. In brief, we will present a series of critical responses directed to him, a letter from the Soviet Ukraine on the Lemko present and future, and our own summation of the Lemko question.

Many of America's Carpatho-Rusyns claim a Lemko heritage, and so we have no doubt that the "Lemkos Today" essay raised both questions and passions among you, our readership — your voices need also be heard. We invite your responses to the issues raised by Hunka, and will print as broad a selection of them as space in the newsletter permits.

GUEST COMMENTARY: THE RISE AND FALL OF A FOLK ENSEMBLE

In 1960, I joined a "dance group" in my church that was preparing for a community ethnic festival. Then about thirteen years old, I began to learn about my heritage. Seventeen years later, as I watched my two children doing what I had done, a fire was kindled: almost like the mythical phoenix, a dance group arose from that fire. "Rusyny" was born on June 4, 1978.

Rusyny — Carpatho-Rusyn Folk Ensemble, co-sponsored by Saint Nicholas Church (McKeesport, Pennsylvania) and the United Societies of U.S.A. existed for ten seasons as a family folk group. It was a labor of love for those who joined. We became an organization with written by-laws and a developing repertoire that expressed the spirit of our people. In over seventy shows the family spirit we shared with our audiences carried us through; our beautiful Rusyn songs and dances became a medium of expression through which we grew together and shared much joy. In many ways, we had the time of our lives!

This past summer we had to make a decision: could Rusyny continue as a viable, living representation of our Carpatho-Rusyn heritage, or should it fold? In September, we disbanded.

My ten years of experience with folk groups shows that there are similar reasons why groups come to the end of the road. Among the top reasons — lack of community support. Groups of volunteers do not continue without interest. There were many selfless volunteers, and though the community lends some financial support, it is limited. Unfortunately, the American Carpatho-Rusyns are not informed and dedicated enough to realize the need for promoting their Rusyn heritage.

Time is another major factor. It takes time to arrange music and choreography. Organizing practice schedules can become almost impossible, with school activities and other interests taking away from "free" time that our members had. Even scheduling and well-organized instruction were not enough.

Is it all worth saving? Emphatically, YES! Can groups be saved? Probably, but not with simple solutions. In fact, our own lack of ethnic awareness needs to be addressed first.

We, as a people, need to think about the fact that so many other nationalities have no problems with self-identity. Irish, Polish, Greek, Italian — they all know their roots, and most communities celebrate their ethnicity. St. Patrick's day, Columbus day, the Sons of Italy — we all know about them! In Pittsburgh, they still dance the Tarantella at Italian weddings: the Polka has become synonymous with the Polish nationality, even though other nationalities polka too! Are the other ethnic groups any better than us? No, they just seem to have more pride and better public relations. Are we ashamed of who we are? We have no reason to be!

The Rusyny ensemble was a labor of love. We are not totally discouraged from its disintegration. There is always hope for the future. Perhaps some day one of our children will see their children dancing, and the fire will be lit again. Through education, understanding, tolerance of our fellow humans, and interest and support, maybe even our people can survive!

A. G. Kovaly
McKeesport, Pennsylvania

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RECENT EVENTS

Cracow, Poland. The Lemkos in Canada was the subject of a lecture by Professor Paul R. Magocsi of the University of Toronto delivered at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow on September 2, 1987. Professor Magocsi was part of an official Canadian delegation taking part in a conference on Poles and other ethnic groups from historic Poland living in Canada. While in southeastern Poland, Professor Magocsi was received as representative of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center by Bishop Adam Dubec of the Orthodox Eparchy of Sanok-Nowy Sącz; by Fedir Goč, founder and director of the Lemko Regional Museum in Zydranowa; and by several Lemko writers and scholars.

Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. On September 15, 1987, Professor Paul R. Magocsi delivered a lecture on recent scholarship in Carpatho-Rusyn Studies at a seminar organized by the Society for Rusyn Language and Literature and the Department of Rusyn Language and Literature at the University of Novi Sad. Professor Magocsi spoke in Vojvodinian Rusyn, and his lecture together with a display of publications distributed by our Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center was featured on Novi Sad television, which has a daily program in the Rusyn language — the only one in the world.

Montreal, Quebec — Hartford, Connecticut. Between September 23 and October 18 the Lemkovyna Folk Ensemble from Poland completed a successful concert tour that brought them to 4 cities in eastern Canada and 17 cities in the northcentral and northeastern United States, including centers of heavy Rusyn-American population such as Pittsburgh; Parma, Ohio; New York City; and Yonkers, New York. The company of 40 singers and musicians presented a lively and moving program of Lemko songs, which by their čardaś-like rhythms and style clearly revealed how much they are similar to Rusyn folk music south of the Carpathians with little or no Polish or Galician Ukrainian influence.

Although the musical program was entirely in Lemko Rusyn dialect, the master of ceremonies who introduced each number (and who is not a member of the ensemble) spoke only in Ukrainian. This is because the concert tour was sponsored by the Ukrainian Canadian Committee and Ukrainian National Association in the United States. While lovers of authentic Rusyn culture must be grateful to Ukrainians in North America who had the initiative to bring the Lemkovyna Ensemble here, it is hoped that in the future some Rusyn-American organization (at the very least the Lemko Sojuz) will have the foresight to organize a similar tour which will not, because of the particular needs of the sponsor, have to provide a Ukrainian facade.

Uniontown, Pennsylvania. On October 25, 1987, St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Church sponsored its 6th Annual Carpatho-Rusyn Celebration under the direction of the Reverend Eugene Yackanich. Each year thousands of people from the greater Uniontown area and beyond attend this lively and well prepared cultural event. A menu of delicious Carpatho-Rusyn foods was served throughout the day. This festival is the only Carpatho-Rusyn church festival known to be held in the United States.

Minneapolis, Minnesota. On Saturday, November 7, 1987, Dr. Patricia Krafcik spoke on the noble brigand or "Robin Hood" tradition in Carpatho-Rusyn folklore and about her travels and studies in the Carpathian region. This event was co-sponsored by the Youth Balalaika Orchestra of St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral, and by the Rusin Association. More than 60 people attended. The following day, after liturgy, Dr. Krafcik made a presentation in the cathedral on behalf of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. The presentation to the clergy and people of St. Mary's was in recognition of the achievement of the 100th anniversary of the parish. The Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center donated a copy of *Our People*, by Paul Magocsi, to the parish library.

Boston, Massachusetts. For the first time, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center was represented at the 19th Annual National Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, which is the publisher of the scholarly quarterly journal, *Slavic Review*, and the largest professional organization of American Slavists. The C-RRC had its own booth at the convention, held at the Park Plaza Hotel, November 5-8, 1987. The display, which featured all works published and/or distributed by our center, was under the direction of C-RRC advisory board member Mary Ann Gaschnig and long-time supporter Mary Ellen Foulds, both of North Andover, Massachusetts. Over 2,000 professional Slavists, librarians, and government administrators viewed the exhibit.



Mary Ellen Foulds answering questions at the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center book display at the Slavic Convention, Boston.

Kiev, USSR. On December 2-3, 1987, Dr. Paul R. Magocsi represented the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center at meetings with the Ukraine Society in Kiev. Discussions focussed on relations of the C-RRC with cultural and scholarly organizations in the Soviet Ukraine, in particular as they concern the receipt of recent publications, our translation series — *Classics in Carpatho-Rusyn Scholarship*, and exchanges of scholars and choreographers. Dr. Magocsi was in the Soviet Union as one of eight Slavists chosen to represent the United States at a scholarly conference sponsored jointly by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, held at the Institute for Slavic and Balkan Studies in Moscow, November 22-30.

FROM OUR READERS

To the Editor:

The summer and fall issues of the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* have brought into focus for the readers of the newsletter the need for the establishment of a university chair of Carpatho-Rusyn studies. In addition, the idea of a national festival and organization of a "Friends" group were mentioned. All of these are ideas that have much to commend them as the need is certainly there and the benefits would be incalculable. All are responsible undertakings requiring much planning and participation. There would be a need for dedicated commitment on the part of all. Though I live a great distance from any contact with Carpatho-Rusyns, my heritage, interest, and support are with you. Perhaps I could even help in some way to help these plans come to fruition.

I eagerly await each issue of the newsletter. We recipients of the dedicated service of the people who make up the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* are indeed fortunate. You do a tremendous job. Thank you!

Helen K. Aldrich
Bend, Oregon

Please note. Wherever you may live, and whatever your talents, you can help the Carpatho-Rusyn American and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. Our volunteers who put out the newsletter and help the Research Center, do so long distance. We live and work in Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Ontario, and draw on the help of people throughout the United States and throughout the world, communicating by letter and phone, with few opportunities to meet face to face. We are all volunteers and always welcome others to join us. If you care to help in any way, please contact me.

The Editor

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor appear in our **From Our Readers** section and are always welcome. We invite, and will publish as space permits, viewpoints on all sides of the issues we present in the newsletter, and other issues that relate to our Carpatho-Rusyn community. If, at all possible, type your letters, and in all cases include your phone number and return address so that authorship can be verified. We also invite you to submit articles you wish to have considered for publication.

DONATIONS

The *Carpatho-Rusyn American* is often the recipient of gifts for which we are most appreciative and without which we would be hard pressed to survive. All of the money we receive, unless the donor requests we use it for some specific purpose, goes into our general budget and is used to meet the expenses of producing the newsletter. These expenses keep mounting year by year, and include not only printing and distribution costs, but also costs incurred in securing and translating the high quality, original material we always try to bring you.

We thank all of you who have so generously supported both the newsletter and the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center over the years, and we ask that others of you consider doing so. All contributions are tax deductible.

Some of our most recent donors are:

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RENEWALS

Many subscriptions to the newsletter expire with this issue, so now may be the time to send in your renewal. You may also want to consider ordering a gift subscription for a friend or family member, or donating a subscription to your parish, local library, or perhaps to your local college or university. We will be happy to notify any gift recipient that the newsletter is being sent because of your generosity. The annual subscription rate is \$12.00 and you may send your payment to:

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OUR FRONT COVER

A Lemko who has returned to his native village of Bartne. Photographed, 1985.

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THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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