FROM THE EDITOR

As we reported in our last issue (Vol. XVI, No. 4, 1993, pp. 3 and 11), the Reverend Maksym Sandovyc, a Lemko-Rusyn Orthodox priest executed by the Austrians in 1914 for his refusal to renounce his affiliation with the Orthodox faith, will be canonized by the Orthodox Church in Poland in early September 1994. Yet another canonization will take place this year, one that is much closer to home and that has particular significance in the early history of Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants in the United States, both Orthodox and Byzantine Catholic. On May 27-30, during the annual pilgrimage to St. Tikhon’s Monastery in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, the Reverend Archpriest Alexis G. Toth will be officially recognized as a saint by the Orthodox Church in America.

Through Toth, who began his career as a Greek Catholic priest in the Prešov Region of Slovakia, thousands of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States embraced Orthodoxy at the turn of the century. Our biography in this issue outlines his life and activities. It is especially interesting to note that the "return to Orthodoxy" initiated by Toth effected a similar mass conversion to Orthodoxy in the European homeland which on the eve of World War I reverberated in the life and activities of Maksym Sandovyc. Like Toth, Sandovyc also left the Greek Catholic Church to serve the newly founded Orthodox parishes in the Lemko Region of Poland. As we approach the threshold of the twenty-first century, the lives, careers, and now the canonization of these two Orthodox priests, Sandovyc and Toth, have dovetailed in an unexpected manner.

Saints officially recognized by the church serve as a model to the faithful through their actions, their accomplishments, or by sacrificing their lives in a way that strengthens and nourishes the life of the church. On what basis, then, does the Orthodox Church make a decision for canonization? And why are Sandovyc and Toth being canonized now? Ordinarily, the process of canonization begins with the local affirmation of a candidate's extraordinary spiritual worth. This affirmation may be made by laypersons, priests, hierarchs, those who knew the candidate, or others whose lives have been touched by the candidate or his or her sanctity. In time, such local veneration comes to the attention of higher ecclesiastical authorities who appoint a Canonization Commission to research the candidate's life.

The commission considers several points in its examination of a candidate. For instance, do the faithful perceive the candidate as an intercessor, as someone who has found special favor with God and who might, even in death, be asked to pray on behalf of a supplicant? Is the candidate's life morally flawless? Are the candidate's teachings perfectly in line with the Orthodox faith? Does the candidate have a strong sense of his special favor with God? For the Orthodox, not all of these conditions are necessary for canonization. In the case of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), the commission presents the conclusions of its study to the Holy Synod of Bishops—the council of all the bishops in the country—who make a final decision. Unlike in the Roman or Byzantine Catholic churches, there is no intermediary stage known as beatification during which yet other miracles or pieces of evidence for a person's sanctity are required in order to move the candidate on to full canonization.

As for Maksym Sandovyc, a strong local veneration has long existed. He is remembered by his people in song and story. His dedication to the Orthodox faith among Lemko Rusyns in Poland is historically unquestionable, and the brutal death for his faith and his people was witnessed as a genuine act of martyrdom. Now, in the wake of the 1989 revolutions and in the atmosphere of the resurgence of Rusyn ethnic awareness, Sandovyc's special sanctity for the church and his people can be publicly recognized.

The situation of Alexis Toth differs from that of Maksym Sandovyc. Here, a significant factor is that this year the Orthodox Church in America is celebrating the bicentennial of Orthodoxy in the United States. In conjunction with this celebration, numerous events are taking place which relate to the historical development of Orthodoxy and Orthodox immigrants and their descendants. From the point of view of the OCA, Toth's "glorification" or canonization is based largely on his activity as an inspiration for thousands of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States to return to Orthodoxy.

The commission investigating Toth's life also found that he has become an intercessor for some faithful. In their official proclamation on Toth's canonization, the Holy Synod of the OCA declared, that "mindful of the apostolic injunction to 'remember your leaders' (Heb. 13:7), we give thanks to God for His great mercy toward us in raising up in our midst a faithful pastor filled with zeal for the glory of God, and for the salvation of his own people." The Holy Synod recognizes Toth's sanctity in his vibrant energy, in his "steadfastness and his leadership in bringing thousands of souls back to the Orthodox Church, manifested by his words and deeds among his own Carpatho-Russian and Galician people in America." In the case of both Sandovyc and Toth, comprehensive biographies are being prepared, icons of the new saints produced, liturgical hymns and verses created, and feastdays designated.

Was it his Greek Catholic heritage that Toth was rejecting in his move to Orthodoxy, or perhaps more accurately what he considered the Roman church's intent on sweeping away all that his people held dear? Whatever the motivation, the Orthodox Church in America benefited enormously from Toth's efforts. Most members of the Orthodox Church in America are descendants of Greek Catholic Rusyns and owe their membership to Toth's activities. In that sense, it would seem quite appropriate during this celebratory year that the Orthodox Church in America reconsider the Carpatho-Rusyn cultural heritage of the majority of its members. This suggestion in no way implies a renewal of the often divisive "ethnic" activity of the past. It is rather a plea on behalf of Toth's descendants that the Orthodox Church in America emphasize the study and encourage the use of Carpathian plainchant in English translation in its churches, that the OCA recognize along with the sanctity of the son of Carpatho-Rusyns also the validity of his cultural heritage—a heritage which has so often occupied second place after the Great Russian legacy.

OUR FRONT COVER
Drawing of Buštino by Alfreed Gluck for Alex Kraus’s book Bustino As Remembered
ALEXIS G. TOTH (1853-1909)

During the last decades of the nineteenth century when tens of thousands of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe began to arrive on America's shores, several new churches were established to serve the spiritual needs of the newcomers. Among the bodies that grew most rapidly by the turn of the twentieth century was the Russian Orthodox Church. This was particularly remarkable in that there were so few Orthodox immigrants from the Russian Empire. Where then, did all these “Russian” Orthodox adherents come from? The answer lies in the story of a man who has come to be known in official Orthodox publications as the “father of Orthodoxy in America.” The person in question was neither Orthodox nor for that matter Russian, but rather a Greek Catholic priest of Carpatho-Rusyn origin named Alexis G. Toth.

Alexis Toth was born in 1853 in a Carpatho-Rusyn village in Spiš county, then in the Hungarian Kingdom and today in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia. The young Alexis followed in the footsteps of his father and was ordained to the priesthood in 1878. Although he began his priestly career in a village parish in the Greek Catholic Diocese of Prešov, this experience was not to last long. Recognizing his talents, the bishop of Prešov appointed Toth in 1880 to be his diocesan chancellor and one year later made him professor and rector of the Greek Catholic Seminary in Prešov. Toth’s career as a high-ranking member of the Rusyn Greek Catholic hierarchy in the European homeland was to last less than a decade, however, because in 1889 he accepted an invitation to go to America.

Unlike the other early priests who served new parishes in Pennsylvania and nearby states, Toth went instead farther west to a small community of Carpatho-Rusyn Greek Catholics in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He celebrated his first mass in November 1889. Soon after, he reported, according to custom, to the local ecclesiastical superior—at the time Roman Catholic Archbishop of St. Paul, John Ireland. This was a fateful meeting. It was brief but stormy and was to change irreversibly the history of Eastern Christianity in the New World.

Archbishop Ireland was at the time one of the leading figures of the so-called Americanization movement. In religious terms, this represented the efforts to have Catholicism accepted into American life. As a corollary, the Catholic Church should remain a unified American church without any distinct ethnic parishes, and furthermore the immigrants had preferably to give up their European traditions (religious and otherwise) and assimilate to the mainstream American norm. Therefore, when Archbishop Ireland learned that the newly-arrived Reverend Toth not only failed to fulfill the Americanizing ideal, but—worse still—he had been married, the Roman Catholic prelate refused to recognize Toth’s priestly status and forbade him to perform his duties. The determined Toth, proud of his own Eastern-rite traditions (which included a married clergy) simply continued to minister to his Minneapolis parish.

Meanwhile, Ireland together with other American bishops convinced the Vatican to decree (on October 1, 1890) that all Greek Catholic priests in America must be celibate and otherwise the immigrants followed Toth’s example by converting many of the native Carpathian villages to Orthodoxy.

It is for these reasons that a very high percentage of the membership in today’s Orthodox Church in America (the successor to the Russian Orthodox Church) are descendants of those early Greek Catholic parishes converted by the father of Orthodoxy in America, the Carpatho-Rusyn priest Alexis G. Toth.

Philip Michaels

UPCOMING EVENT

South Canaan, Pennsylvania. On May 27-30, 1994, at St. Tikhon’s Orthodox Monastery and Seminary, the Reverend Archpriest Alexis G. Toth will be canonized by the Orthodox Church in America. Ceremonies of canonization, celebrated by Metropolitan Theodosius and other members of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the OCA, will take place during the 90th Annual Memorial Day Pilgrimage to the Monastery where the archpriest is buried. An invitation to attend the ceremonies has been extended to Bishop Nikolai of the Orthodox Church in Slovakia’s Prešov Region and other dignitaries. For further information, contact St. Tikhon’s Seminary main office (717-937-4411) or the Diocesan Center of Eastern Pennsylvania (717-937-4686).
THE JEWS OF OLD MÁRAMAROS IN THE HOMELAND, NEW YORK CITY, AND TEL AVIV

The following piece is excerpted from an article of the same title in "Going Home," Jack Kugelmass, ed., Northwestern University Press and Yivo Annual (21), 1993, pp. 369-394. The author, Dr. Slyomovics, is an assistant professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Brown University. This is the first of three articles on Jews in Subcarpathian Rus' by different authors which will appear in this year's issues of the C·RA.—Editor

My family background connects me to a place in East Central Europe—the old Hungarian Maramaros county in Subcarpathian Rus', which is located largely in today’s Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. Until recently I had never seen this place with my own eyes, but rather experienced it through tales and legends recounted by parents, relatives, and the larger circle of former inhabitants who now meet at landsmanshaft or hometown society meetings organized by Jewish emigrants in New York City and Tel Aviv.

I finally journeyed to the area in connection with my research on Maramaros Jews and on the legends and activities of a miracle-working rabbi named Rebbele (Rabbi) Mordkhele Leifer. His gravesite in Maramaros continues to be a place of pilgrimage and is located in my mother’s native village, rendered in Czech as Bušťino (Hungarian: Bustyahaza; Rusyn: Buštyna; Yiddish: Bishtina). Until May 1989, interviews and oral narratives were the only possible sources concerning the subject of my inquiries. Other American Jews had regularly visited ancestral villages in Poland or Hungary. I could not go as a tourist to what had been, during my parents’ time between the two world wars, the Czechoslovak province of Subcarpathian Rus’. After World War II, the Soviets annexed Subcarpathian Rus’ (including those districts of the former Hungarian county of Maramaros that lay north of the Tysa River) and called their new acquisition the Transcarpathian oblast of the Ukrainian SSR. Until very recently only the oblast capital of Uzhhorod (Hungarian: Ungvár), one hundred and fifty kilometers distant from my parents’ villages, was accessible to travellers on restricted and expensive tours conducted by the former Soviet Union’s state travel bureau, Intourist.

After 1918, when Maramaros was divided between Czechoslovakia and Romania, the county ceased to exist as an administrative entity except in the collective memory of its former inhabitants. This is particularly marked among Maramaros Jews currently residing in New York City, Tel Aviv, or even in present-day Transcarpathia. It is only among these surviving Jews that the idea of an intact pre-1918 Austro-Hungarian Maramaros county is sustained. In effect, their organizations and institutions continue to represent a place that exists primarily by way of a collective will to remember.

Memories of life in Maramaros narrated by and about my family were painful experiences, whereas my travelling alone to Soviet Transcarpathia finally in 1989 was a carefree, enjoyable adventure that neither enhanced nor negated the vividness of representations conveyed to me through decades of storytelling. I tramped the Carpathian foothills intrigued by their striking resemblance to New York State’s Catskill Mountains. Now that visits are possible, many of my parents’ generation actually choose to avoid the trip back home, since for them the recollection of past destruction brings only bitterness so intense that treading on identical earth and dust where atrocities against Jews took place is unthinkable.

In my research on Rebbele Mordkhele and the Jews of Maramaros, the question I have addressed to myself is this: what have been the expressive and performative ways for Maramaros Jews currently living in Tel Aviv and New York City to replicate Maramaros the place? How are images and recollected knowledge of a destroyed past transmitted by ritual performances?

I would suggest that this particular diaspora community has responded in two primary ways: first, by means of narrative and storytelling; and second, by a physical recreation of lost Maramaros territory. The latter is a replication elsewhere of what is ineluctably physical, namely the unvisitiable Jewish cemeteries of Maramaros county. In New York City, reclaimed Maramaros takes the form of a landsmanshaft-owned cemetery, while in Tel Aviv it is in the form of a synagogue combined with a Holocaust memorial which functions as a cemetery. In contrast, for the few remaining Maramaros Jews still living in present-day Transcarpathia, and who still possess what is lost in New York City and Tel Aviv—that is, the geographical space with its crucial sites of burial—the narrative is ruptured and instead the cemetery has become a place of prayer, the locus for the lost and destroyed synagogues.

Place Memory

I begin with a description of the diaspora community of New York City. That community is organized in the form of two landsmanshaft: the Federation of Maramaros Jews in America founded in 1924, and the all-male First Maramaros Young Men’s Aid Society founded in 1912. The two sur-

Tombstone listing Jewish villages and towns of Maramaros. Wall plaques list the Holocaust dead. Memorial Room, Maramarosh House (Bet Maramarosh) synagogue, Tel Aviv, Israel (photo: Susan Slyomovics)
vive to the present time because they preserve and expand one of the hometown society’s original functions as a chevra kadisha, or burial society for those members who either died in New York or who perished during the Holocaust. The landsmanshaftn bury and commemorate these two categories of the dead by maintaining three cemeteries for America’s Maramaros Jews and by honoring in annual ceremonies the sixty thousand natives of Maramaros who perished in the Holocaust and received no burial.

In Israel, the cemetery that articulates Maramaros terrain is located within the architectural space of a Tel Aviv synagogue. Known as Maramaros House (Hebrew: Bet Maramarosh), it was dedicated on April 29, 1973, as a central meeting place for the remaining Jews of Maramaros in Israel and the diaspora. The building is both a synagogue and a memorial house. The iconography of Holocaust mourning replaces the traditional markings of Jewish synagogues. Other Holocaust themes, often depicts of secular scenes such as the land, the people, and life in Maramaros, alternate in the Maramaros House’s folk art and architecture with more traditional Jewish synagogue decoration.

While the eastern wall of the first floor is furnished with ritual objects characteristic of a Jewish house of prayer, a fixture unusual in a synagogue stands opposite the ark containing the Torah scrolls: a glass painting in a folk style showing a map of the pre-1918 Hungarian county of Maramaros, bounded by the names: Carpathians, Bukovina, Szatmar county, and Hungary—all hand-painted in Hebrew script. A second glass painting represents the main synagogue in the town of Valea Vișeului, located south of the Tysa River, in part of Maramaros which is now in Romania. As the congregation prays, it faces the holy ark containing the Torah scrolls. Behind their backs is the map of Maramaros, the artistic representation of their European-based brotherhood. This is an unusual instance of Jewish devotional practice backed up literally and figuratively by a parallel and competing religion of secular memory.

Another heterodox feature in the layout of the synagogue is a room called heder hazikaron, or memorial room. This room functions as the equivalent of the cemeteries that the Maramaros Jews are unable or unwilling to visit in Transcarpathia. The memorial room is a small square space kept perpetually dark except for small “eternal lights.” In the center is a large black tombstone engraved with the one hundred and sixty names of Maramaros villages and districts. Around the walls, district by district, further subdivided village by village, are memorial plaques etched with the names of the dead. The space functions at once as a metaphorical cemetery, because there can be no corpses, and as an actual cemetery, not only because of the presence of recreated grave-stones but also because the room is opened to the community during periods of ritual mourning. While Maramaros House shares some of the iconic features of the Holocaust memorial at the Yad Vashem Heroes and Martyrs Memorial Authority in Jerusalem, it is functionally a synagogue for study and prayer into which has been introduced a cemetery. As a synagogue and a cemetery, it is also a site of tourist pilgrimage during the spring “memorial season.”

The Maramaros House in Tel Aviv is now a center for all Maramaros Jews in Israel and elsewhere in the world which almost every tourist of Maramaros extraction visiting Israel finds an opportunity to come and visit. All yearly ceremonies in commemoration of the Holocaust victims originating from Maramaros are held at the synagogue. Finally, the Maramaros synagogue-cum-cemetery is a private, independent, spontaneous commemorative gesture which may be construed as a series of ritual acts and icons set up in opposition to the Israeli state-built and organized civic Holocaust memorials such as Yad Vashem. Therefore, people of Maramaros living in Israel need not participate in Yom Hashoah, Israel’s nationally mandated Holocaust Day, or other activities sponsored by Yad Vashem, the national memorial site to the Holocaust.

Indigenous Processes of Narrative Memory

Other landsmanshaftn made it their first priority to commemorate the history of their demolished communities by writing and publishing memorial books (yizkor bikker) immediately after World War II, but the Maramaros landsmanshaftn were clear about the primary focus of their cultural memorializing. In the preface to their memorial book published as late as 1980, the authors state that once the project of the erection of Maramaros House in Israel has been brought to successful fruition, there resurfaced the idea of publishing a Memorial Book of Maramaros. Certain features of the Maramaros memorial book depart from the generic model. For example, it was written in Hebrew with an English preface, not in Yiddish, possibly because Hungarian, not Yiddish, was a primary language of many of the Jews. Also, unlike the usual memorial book which reverses the traditional order of Jewish mourning practices, the Maramaros synagogue-cemetery-memorial house and the memorial book place in correct order the two mourning injunctions: first to bury and then to remember.

The Maramaros memorial book is the official recording of the past of an entire region, not of an individual shetl or town. Privately, many friends, relatives, and other subscribers to the Memorial Book of Maramaros have voiced reservations concerning its emphasis on historical figures drawn largely from a religious, Orthodox, or Hasidic past at the expense of a more textured, secular history. In response, other memorialists, which overlap with but flesh out the official record, continue to be written and published. Alexander Kraus has chosen to author a personal history of his native village which he began writing in 1980, entitled Buștino as Remembered. The last in the series of dedications is to “our descendants, wherever they may be in the world, who have only heard, or may only hear about Buștino.” Though Kraus chooses never to walk again where he once lived, his first chapter, “A Guided Tour Around Buștino,” takes us on an imaginary tour of the village in which “such a walk would have taken three hours and one would have seen everything worth seeing.”

Kraus’s choice of a drawing over photography for his proposed bookcover discloses his unconscious understanding of the myth of photographic truth. In the years before World War I, many Bisthiners who had emigrated to Palestine or America received an emblematic postcard from their hometown. In the foreground, a tiny, almost imperceptible, dark figure is moving diagonally across the postcard. He has just passed my maternal grandmother Elefant’s store. It is winter and a light coating of snow dusts the landscape, the houses, a fir tree, and the shadowy distant Carpathian foothills.

Rather than use this well-known photograph as it was, Kraus decided in 1982 on a visit to Israel to commission Alfred (Israel) Gluck (whose wife Marta Craus comes from Buștino) to produce a cover drawing that would be based on the famous postcard. Gluck’s black-and-white line drawing cropped the photograph, thereby eliminating any internal and external writing on it, and added a large hand-printed street sign, “Our Village,” which continued its lettering down to the lower right hand corner forming the completed
Rebbe Mordkhele Tales

When my mother was a child in the 1930s in Büstino, her mother's store, depicted in the postcard, marked the main crossroads of the village. One road led westward to the towns of Chust and Mukačevo; a second north-south street curved towards the cemetery which was then on the periphery of the village. By the time I arrived to the Büstino of 1989, a town of 30,000 inhabitants, the cemetery was located in the center of the town. Just as the Büstino cemetery, once located on the periphery, now located as the center of Jewish worship, so too the legends of the rabbi have supplanted pilgrimage as a ritual of commemoration.

Rabbi Mordkhele, who is buried in Büstino, was called the Nadvorner Rabbi. Like many of the miracle-working rabbis of Máramaros, he was not originally from the region but, as his title indicates, from Nadvorná in neighboring Galicia, where he was born in 1826. He was part of the influential migration of Galician rabbis and religious practices that moved southwards over the Carpathian mountains. His religious affiliation is described in ambiguous terms because he is thought to have gone southward perhaps to flee from the Frankists, a powerful offshoot of the Sabbatian movement opposed to rabbinic Judaism. Nonetheless, Rabbi Mordkhele’s genealogical and scholarly lineage was distinguished: he was a nephew of Rabbi Meir of Przemysl, and his rabbinical authority derived from Rabbi Israel of Rizhzin (1796-1850), the great-grandson of the notable Hasidic rabbi, the Maggid of Mezeritch.

He was thought to have extraordinary powers and the ability to perform miracles. By several accounts, he was one of three famous rabbis of Subcarpathian Rus’—and by many deemed the strangest. Men and women, Jews and non-Jews, patronized Rabbi Mordkhele during his lifetime and later flocked to his Büstino gravesite where he was buried in 1896. He was known for making the high low and the low high, the rich poor and the poor rich. He could “make and break families.” My great-great-grandfather, Melekh Elefant, was reputed to have lost his lumber business because he did not pay proper homage to Rabbi Mordkhele, whom he visited only after praying at the court of the rival Szigeter Rebbe (rabbi of Sighetul). Rabbi Mordkhele sternly rebuked my ancestor with words that foretold the financial failures of subsequent generations: “I am not a toilet for you to stop at on the way back. I want you to make a special trip to see me. You will pay dearly.”

Rabbi Mordkhele was said to be equally peremptory towards man, God, and the illnesses visited by God upon man. A story from my father concerning the rabbi’s bout with rheumatism begins with his physician prescribing the customary cure of taking the waters at the mineral spring of Várhegy, located several kilometers into the Carpathian mountains. Patients usually spent thirty days taking the cure, during which time family entourages would camp near the springs in order to immerse themselves once each day in the restorative sulphurous waters. After delaying his cure for months, Rabbi Mordkhele arrived with his Hasidic followers in thirty wagons loaded with cooking utensils, food, and books. In the afternoon he and his followers prayed, and awakened the next morning to pray again. Then Rabbi Mordkhele entered the mineral baths. He immersed himself thirty times, representing the prescribed thirty immersions in thirty days, exited from the baths, and prayed addressing God in these often recounted phrases: “Lord of the Universe, I have done my part, now you do yours.” He packed everything and told his followers to break camp.

There are numerous tales of the miracles he performed during his lifetime and even after his death. My relative, Hayyim Schreter, had a wife who could not conceive. Schreter was told by Rabbi Mordkhele to buy enough white linen cloth to cover the entire cemetery, then to cut up the material in pieces, to distribute them to the poor, and then his wife would become pregnant. His wife eventually bore him a runty, half-witted child. Though mentally deficient, the child called Mendi was considered to exhibit a charmed life. One story recounted how Mendi was reported to have miraculously escaped the gas chambers at Auschwitz/Birkenau by climbing out of a narrow opening in the gas chamber window. After the war, when he settled in Montreal, Mendi once again escaped through iron-barred windows, this time from the psychiatric ward of the Allen Memorial Mental Hospital. Other versions of how Mendi’s life was saved in Auschwitz also show the continued working of the rebbe’s blessing in Mendi’s life: a Kapo was (so they say) enamored of the young Mendi and altered the tattoo number on his arm which would otherwise have sent him to the gas chambers. This explained how Mendi magically possessed two concentration camp numbers burned into his flesh.

More recently, in 1985 in Israel, my mother and I encountered two doctors originally from a town in the vicinity of Rabbi Mordkhele’s grave. They claimed that the rabbi—or his memory —was currently known for miraculously obtaining exit visas from the Soviet Union for Jews and non-Jews. They related how a dozen Jewish doctors had applied to leave Soviet Transcarpathia, but had been refused the right to emigrate for twelve years. On the advice of his father, one of the doctors and a friend decided to visit, to pray, and to light candles at Rabbi Mordkhele’s grave. Within a month both were granted the long-awaited exit visas.

My favorite childhood tale about Rabbi Mordkhele encodes an ambivalent view of the miracle-working rabbi’s efficacy. In Büstino, a man challenged another to stick a pole into the grave of Rabbi Mordkhele at midnight. The man who agreed to perform this impious act to win a bet was wearing a long caftan. When he stuck the pole into the grave, he was unaware that the pole had become entangled in his coat hem. He died of a heart attack on the spot, believing that Rabbi Mordkhele was pulling him into his grave. The question that preoccupied both Máramaros atheists and believers was whether this man was punishing himself for desecrating a grave, or was it indeed Rabbi Mordkhele “calling him to the other side.”

Miraculously the story is not over. It is as if sometimes historical events, however feebly and haltingly, have realigned narrative with place. After May 1, 1989, tourism outside of designated provincial cities was permitted in the former Soviet Ukraine. Three categories of tourists have appeared in recent years, each group focusing in different ways on the miracle-working rabbi. Nadvorner Hasidim (Hassidic Jews from Nadvorná) residing in Israel and the United States are embarking on pilgrimages to Rabbi Mordkhele’s grave. Soviet Jews who emigrated from Transcarpathia in the 1970s are returning to visit family and friends and to introduce American-born children to their former towns, including Büstino. Finally, the third group, with no ties to the area, is being lured by the mountains and mineral springs, where Rabbi Mordkhele sought his cure.

Susan Slyomovics
Providence, Rhode Island
Connie Zatkovich Ash, who wrote this article for the C-RA, is a daughter of the late Gregory I. Zatkovich, the first governor of Subcarpathian Rus' when it was an autonomous province in the former Czechoslovakia. Since 1990, the city in which she resides, Corvallis, Oregon, has been a Sister City to Uzhhorod, Ukraine. In that time, the family has renewed efforts in researching their father’s history and gathering books and materials for the family archives.—Editor

From October 27 to November 4, 1992, my daughter Jennifer and I returned to the land of my father’s roots in the former Czechoslovakia and in neighboring Transcarpathia in Ukraine. We went specifically to participate in a special ceremony at Prague Castle. My father, Gregory I. Zatkovich, president of the Directorium and first governor of historic Subcarpathian Rus’ (1919-1921), was among sixty-four persons posthumously honored with the presentation of the Tomáš G. Masaryk Award for Distinguished Service to Building Democracy and Protecting Human Rights. In Prague, we viewed a bronze bust of my father in the Military Museum. We were also the first family members to visit Subcarpathian Rus (Transcarpathia) in seventy years. While there, we saw the old governor’s palace where my father and mother, Leona, had lived with two of our seven siblings. We walked the cobblestone streets of Uzhhorod’s old town and visited the fortress castle on the top of a hill which once housed a seminary where our family had lived until their residence was ready for occupancy. My journey to the homeland was brief but dramatic, and it took me back into a history that I had known only through my father’s stories and scrapbooks.

We had heard many of the tales: Gregory Zatkovich had immigrated to the United States at age five because his father, Pavel, an outspoken editor against the oppressive Austro-Hungarian government, was forced to flee with the police at his heels; that Gregory was a brilliant student and received his law degree from the University of Pennsylvania; that he had met our mother, Leona Kotheimer, one summer at an Ohio resort, and after a year’s courtship, they were married in 1915 in her hometown of Youngstown, Ohio; that Dad was appointed first governor of Subcarpathian Rus’ when, after World War I, it became an autonomous province within Czechoslovakia; and that he was the first American to retain his citizenship while heading a foreign government.

We grew up in Homestead and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Each of us children has our own vivid memories of our father. Among the shared remembrances were his love of music and the times when Gypsy bands would enliven parties in our home; his ability to play the piano by ear; his beautiful tenor voice; his love of education (he had strict rules for our studying); his great powers of concentration; his continuing involvement in U.S. election campaigns and plans for how the family would help with the mailings encouraging people to register to vote; his deep morality and honesty—we learned valuable lessons from him; the six or seven languages he spoke, switching from one to the other on the phone, and how he and mother would speak German if there was something they did not want us to hear. Every two years we have a family reunion and more stories are told.

The large brown leather scrapbook, kept in the drawer of the entry hallway in our home, was always a delight to us children and I’m afraid we almost wore it out. It contained newspaper clippings about Dad as governor, Mother, and about Greg and Joan, my brother and sister who were both born there. Their life in the governor’s palace seemed for us a veritable fairytale. There were photos of the bronze bust of Dad which he said was probably melted down for scrap during World War II; pictures of him with Czechoslovakia’s founding president Tomáš Masaryk and other dignitaries before the replica of the Liberty Bell presented as a gift to Subcarpathian Rus’ from Rusyn Americans. Most impressive to our young minds were the photos of our sister Joan’s grave showing a white wrought iron fence surrounding it. She died in Uzhhorod of sarcomatosis at age three and a half and was buried in Calvary Hill Cemetery at the request of the people there. Dad had even composed a ballad about this sad day. In a prominent place in our living room hung the impressive oil painting of Dad as governor. His black, piercing eyes seemed to follow us everywhere. I do not think we were aware then that he was only about thirty three years old when the portrait was done.

In the years following Dad’s death from pneumonia in Pittsburgh in 1967 at age eighty, we never forgot the tales of Subcarpathian Rus’ and the part Dad had played in its formation, even if we were not that familiar with the history leading up to it. After leaving the post of governor in 1921, he continued as a strong advocate for the Rusyn people through writing and lecturing, while at the same time maintaining his law practice and at various times working as City Solicitor of Pittsburgh and workmen’s compensation judge, legal counsel to the Pittsburgh Greek Catholic Eparchy, and founder of the Slav Congress. Later in life, he compiled and published a map of Pittsburgh after several years of arduously tracking streets and addresses. He would invite us along for a drive or walk to find lanes and areas unlisted in outdated maps of the city. Then we would stop for an ice cream soda treat.

All of these memories came back to me as my daughter, Jennifer, and I participated in the ceremony awarding Dad the Masaryk diploma on October 28, 1992. Representing Dad and the entire family, I received the award from Prime Minister Ján Stráský in the fourteenth-century Vladislav Hall on Prague’s Castle Hill (Hradčany). It was the last national holiday for Czechoslovakia before the country became two
republics. We resided for a few days on the castle grounds and had our own key to the main building. Looking out of the windows to the courtyards below, I pictured my parents there in the castle when Mother accompanied Dad to Prague for meetings with President Masaryk and his foreign minister, Eduard Beneš, concerning issues pertinent to Subcarpathian Rus'.

One of the highlights of our stay in Prague was a viewing of the bronze bust of Dad which he thought had been destroyed. During a visit to that city one year before, Jennifer had left photocopies of the bust at many museums, and much to our amazement one later responded by letter that indeed they had the original. After a great deal of activity, arrangements were made for the bust to be brought from the archives to the Military Museum where we were given an opportunity to see it on display. Looking and touching the original was truly a moving experience for us. Dad looked so young to me "face to face," and very handsome.

From Prague we took an overnight train to Čop, on the border between Slovakia, Hungary, and Ukraine, and were driven from there to Užhorod, the former capital of Subcarpathian Rus' and now the administrative center of Transcarpathia. During the next three days we explored the city, especially the streets of the old town where my parents' residence was located in what was called the Governor's Palace. It is now an art museum and writers' guild. We entered the well-preserved building, now painted in yellow and white, and saw the wide concrete walls (four feet or more), the wooden parquet floors, and the tall ceramic tile heaters in the arched corners of the rooms. We were not sure, but one section on the second level seemed to have once been living quarters. An adjoining office may have been where Dad carried on his mission of trying to unite the various factions in Subcarpathian Rus' and where he received visitors and dignitaries. A display of colorful modern art was now hung on the walls for public display.

We also visited the thirteenth-century Užhorod castle overlooking the sweeping valleys below, at that time aglow with golden autumn foliage. One of the old wooden churches could be seen off in the distance with its tall towers and distinctive wooden slatted roofs. Mother had written in her letters to her sister Colette that they stayed in the Greek Catholic Seminary housed on the castle grounds until the palace residence was ready for them.

Next, we approached the hills of Calvary Cemetery to search for Joan's grave. Considering the extensive area to cover, it seemed impossible that we could locate it. We wandered around looking for a wrought iron enclosed area as shown in the photo which we carried with us. It was rainy and slippery that day, and we were unable to locate it. The following day was All Souls' Day and people came in great numbers bringing flowers, wreaths, candles, and brooms and shovels to fix up their loved ones' graves. There was solemn music coming from the loudspeakers. Our host, Oleg Yamalov, first asked the caretaker for a map, but there were no records. The man talked of an old section at the top of the hill, and we slowly made our way up to the crest, coming to an area that was overgrown and neglected.

Four of us started looking, and within a half hour, Oleg called out for us to come over. He had found a marble obelisk, completely covered with dirt, and was trying to clear the caked earth from the letters. Slowly the name emerged out of the past—Joanna Irina Žatkovič. It was a highly emotional moment and we all stood in disbelief. There was no wrought iron fence around the grave; it had decayed or was perhaps stolen. We pulled the stone upright and it was not broken.

We remembered another letter of Mother's written to her sister Colette after Joan's death on June 24, 1922, in which she wrote the following: "It was a touching sight to see all the peasants come to pay their respects with their little offerings, flowers, which they placed around her coffin. Forty priests led the way on foot singing, and at least a thousand people followed. The Rusyn choir sang up there. They said it was beautiful. She received lovely flowers. President Masaryk sent such a lovely cross and a sweet personal letter of condolence. Telegrams and letters poured in here for a week from all over the country. The people here, that is the Rusyn people, feel that our little girl is a link between them and Jerry's [Gregory I. Zatkovich's] future work for them, as they say it is their guarantee that he will not forget them. They call her their little patron in heaven." Mother was unable to go to the cemetery since she was also ill with scarlet fever. Dad had already resigned as governor by that time. Greg, Jr., was five when the family returned to the United States.

During our visit to Užhorod, Mayor Emil Landovský promised that the gravesite would be restored and cared for. Other kind people we met there, including Vasilij Sočka, of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, and Tamara Hrytsa, a teacher, said they would visit the grave. Mr. Sočka interviewed us at length about Dad, saying that there were few books and documents that still exist about Subcarpathian Rus' history. The hope is that some of these historic records that might have been hidden in private homes or buried will in time be recovered.

Three days was too short a time to explore Užhorod thoroughly. We were on a personal mission and it was a successful one. But we want to return to this beautiful area in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains with the River Už flowing through it. We observed so many contrasts with our own life. The majority of the people have great needs and lack sufficient food and energy, employment, and education. Things taken for granted by us in the United States—hot water, balanced meals—are absolute luxuries to most of the population.

We know that Dad would be very excited about the new independence and future possibilities in his homeland, but would be well aware of the struggle and real work ahead. God bless the Rusyn people.

Connie Zatkovich Ash
Corvallis, Oregon
**VOICE OF CARPATHO-RUSYNS WORLDWIDE**

Since the Revolution of 1989, several Rusyn-language newspapers and magazines have appeared in Europe. Nonetheless, the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* remains the only publication that discusses all aspects of past and present developments among Carpatho-Rusyns wherever they live. Aside from hundreds of individual subscribers, each issue of the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* is read by thousands of readers who have access to the 55 libraries worldwide that receive our publication.

Is your local public, college, or university library on the following list? If not, bring in a copy and urge the librarian to order current and back issues.

Allen County Public Library (Fort Wayne, Indiana)
American Geographical Society (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)
American Geographical Society (New York, New York)
Andy Warhol Museum (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
Archiw Państwowy (Warsaw, Poland)
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Munich, Germany)
Beaverdale Public Library (Beaverdale, Pennsylvania)
British Library (London, United Kingdom)
Byzantine Catholic Seminary Library (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
Dom Kultury Narodow (Humenné, Slovakia)
Harvard College Library (Cambridge, Massachusetts)
Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute (Cambridge, Massachusetts)
Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)
Immigration History Research Center (St. Paul, Minnesota)
Indiana Avenue Senior High School Library (Indiana, Pennsylvania)
Indiana University Library (Bloomington, Indiana)
Institut Badań Polonijnych (Cracow, Poland)
Instytut Karpatyki, Užhorod State University (Užhorod, Ukraine)
Irón Range Research Center (Chisholm, Minnesota)
John Carroll University Library (Cleveland, Ohio)
Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.)
Magyarszági Ruszinok Szervezete (Budapest, Hungary)

---

**YUGOSLAV RUSYN YOUTH FUND**

The first concrete results of our campaign for Rusyn youth in Yugoslavia have begun. In 1993, we collected $1,700. Of these funds, $1,500 were donated as planned to the Ruska Matka Society in Ruski Kerestur, Yugoslavia (Serbia). Those funds are being used: (1) to publish eight monthly issues of the children’s journal *Zahradka*, that is, through the rest of 1994; and (2) to cover the printing costs for a new Rusyn grammar to be used in Rusyn language courses in schools where otherwise Serbian is the language of instruction.

The remaining $200 will form the beginning of the campaign for the Yugoslav Rusyn Youth Fund in 1994. Please be generous. A donation of $50 or more will go a long way in helping our people in war-torn Yugoslavia.

Yugoslav Rusyn Youth Fund
Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, Inc.
Box 131-B
Orwell, VT 05760

---

**A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage**

**THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN**

The *Carpatho-Rusyn American* (ISSN 0749-9213) is a quarterly publication of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center Inc., a non-profit cultural organization whose purpose is to promote knowledge about all aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn culture through the publication and distribution of scholarly and educational material about the Carpatho-Rusyn heritage in Europe and America.

General inquiries concerning the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and all communications concerning this publication, should be directed to:

Carpatho-Rusyn American
132 Hawthorne Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15218
Phone: 412-371-3823

Patricia A. Krafick, Editor

Annual Subscription is $12.00
REUNION IN A RUSYN VILLAGE—
67 YEARS LATER

As it happened to thousands of Carpatho-Rusyn families throughout East Central Europe in the twentieth century, so it happened to ours. Burdensome poverty, two world wars and the Iron Curtain would conspire to separate families and effectively isolate the closest of relatives for decades, making them virtual strangers to one another. My father, John Baycura, was born in 1886 in the Rusyn village of Vyšné Čabiny in northeastern Slovakia. He was the only son and the oldest of the six children of Andrew and Maria Kohutova Bajcurova. When he was growing up, Central Europe was in political, social, and economic turmoil. Rusyn men, desperate for work to help alleviate the crippling poverty in their native villages, were leaving for America in increasing numbers.

In 1903, both my grandfather and father headed for the United States to join relatives and fellow countrymen who had preceded them to the mines, mills, and factories of western Pennsylvania. After a short stint in the States, my grandfather returned to his family in Vyšné Čabiny to stay. Until 1922, my father returned for several extended “visits” to America, returning to his native village only briefly, once in 1907 to marry and again in 1922 to build a new church. Rather than work in the mills, he spent all of those years at work as a craftsman, carpenter, homebuilder, and contractor. At the same time, he established a reputation as a cabinetmaker, woodcarver, violin maker, artist, and decorator-gilder.

In 1915, my father made his first iconostasis. It was for his parish church in Lyndora, Pennsylvania, St. John the Baptist Uhro-Rusin Greek Catholic Church, established in 1913 by immigrants largely from the villages of Habura, Čabiny, Mikova, and the city of Uzhhorod. By 1923, father had crafted four more iconostases for churches in Lyndora, Nesquehoning, Mingo Junction, and Sykesville, Pennsylvania.

In the interim, however, he signed a contract to tear down the old church in Vyšné Čabiny, damaged during World War I, and build a new one for the sum of 250,000 Czechoslovak crowns. He returned home and hired more than 70 villagers, both men and women, to work on the demolition and construction. The church was completed, approved by the engineers, and the bells installed in June of 1923. His contract fulfilled, father left for the United States for the fourth and last time.

In 1925, father arranged for his wife Maria, my brother John, my sister Mary, and me. Peter ages 17, 16, and 2, respectively to leave Vyšné Čabiny and join him in a new home he had constructed for the family in Lyndora. Mother died of pneumonia within a year after coming to Lyndora. Although my father continued faithfully to send money and correspondence with his parents and his five sisters as long as he lived, he never set eyes on Čabiny or his parents and sisters again. Nor would my brother, my sister, or I ever see our aunts. When father died in 1965, I assumed responsibility for writing to the remaining aunts, and then to their families when the aunts were gone.

By the time he died, my father had achieved renown for his handcarved eastern-rite sanctuary architecture and furnishings. His output included eight complete iconostases and numerous individual pieces of architecture. His largest work was a full four-tiered iconostasis for St. John Chrysostom Greek Catholic Church in Pittsburgh, carved piece by piece in the kitchen of our family apartment in Lyndora. It appeared in the Rotogravure section of the Sunday Pittsburgh Press on Sunday, June 21, a first cousin, Anna Kumičaková Hiličanský, her husband Gejza, and their son-in-law Dr. Vladimir Ferko, drove up to Presov from Michalovce in two cars. They met us at Presov Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist where our tour group was attending a Divine Liturgy. They became our hosts and provided transportation for our family until our return to Košice the next evening.

The church was completed, approved by the engineers, and the bells installed in June of 1923. His contract fulfilled, father left for the United States for the fourth and last time.

In 1925, father arranged for his wife Maria, my brother John, my sister Mary, and me. Peter ages 17, 16, and 2, respectively to leave Vyšné Čabiny and join him in a new home he had constructed for the family in Lyndora. Mother died of pneumonia within a year after coming to Lyndora. Although my father continued faithfully to send money and correspondence with his parents and his five sisters as long as he lived, he never set eyes on Čabiny or his parents and sisters again. Nor would my brother, my sister, or I ever see our aunts. When father died in 1965, I assumed responsibility for writing to the remaining aunts, and then to their families when the aunts were gone.

By the time he died, my father had achieved renown for his handcarved eastern-rite sanctuary architecture and furnishings. His output included eight complete iconostases and numerous individual pieces of architecture. His largest work was a full four-tiered iconostasis for St. John Chrysostom Greek Catholic Church in Pittsburgh, carved piece by piece in the kitchen of our family apartment in Lyndora. It appeared in the Rotogravure section of the Sunday Pittsburgh Press on Sunday, June 21, a first cousin, Anna Kumičaková Hiličanský, her husband Gejza, and their son-in-law Dr. Vladimir Ferko, drove up to Presov from Michalovce in two cars. They met us at Presov Greek Catholic Cathedral of St. John the Baptist where our tour group was attending a Divine Liturgy. They became our hosts and provided transportation for our family until our return to Košice the next evening. That afternoon, after 67 years, long separated family members were reunited. It happened to ours. The joy of close

A ritual of hearty embraces, excited questions, toasts, feastings, at times folk songs, and the tendering of mementos and gifts was observed in every relative’s home we visited. We had our first hint of this several days earlier when we spent the day with Dana Doničová Dragulova, a second cousin, and her husband Josef. They have an apartment in the home of his parents in Partizánske, a town in far western Slovakia about halfway between Bratislava and Banska Bystrica. Dana and Josef, who were married a couple years ago, were expecting their first child early in July. (A son, Henrich, was born on July 14.)

Our tour of Slovakia, Vienna, Transcarpathia, and Prague was a treat for the eyes, the senses, and worthy of repeat visits. For me and my family, however, it was the Čabiny experience that was the most meaningful. The joy of close
family relatives meeting for the first time in the ancestral family home and village, after so many decades of isolation, was overwhelming. It was a thrill to see our son David and our daughter Dianne meet their cross cousins, and our 16-year-old twin grandson, Michael David, meet his parallel, 16-year-old female, twin cousins Ariana and Jana Cicak from Humenne.

Everywhere we turned we saw reminders of our roots. I felt a profound sense of belonging. Around us were the places my father had spoke of so fondly: the Carpathian Mountains, the Laborec river and valley, the home, the village, and the church. We actually stood in the ancestral family home built by my father and grandfather in 1907. The date “1907” and a three-barred cross carved into a ceiling beam by my father when the house was built was clearly visible. We stood in the room in which I was born, with the hook from which my cradle hung still in place in the overhead beam. Up and down the street were the homes of my mother and my dad’s sisters.

In the middle of the afternoon we rushed off to the village church to attend a memorial service (panachida) for my deceased parents. It was purposely scheduled for our visit by relatives and it took on a singular importance inasmuch as my father had built this handsome village church back in 1922-1923. After the service, we were proudly escorted to the vestibule to see the large marble plaque which was erected in 1966 and to read the line, “Holovnyj Stavbar I. Bajcura” (Principle Architect J. Baycura). We also spent time in the cemetery at the rear of the church, stopping at the graves of my grandparents and my five aunts. In doing so, we noted the many graves bearing familiar family names of founders of our parish church, St. John the Baptist in Lyndora, such as Demjanović, Gavula, Herman, Hussar, Moroz, Koropčak, Uran, and Zelinka.

Čabiny remains to this day a typical Rusyn village, remote but beautifully situated in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Originally, the village was divided into Nižné, Sredné, and Vyšné (Lower, Middle, and Upper) Čabiny. Today it is simply Čabiny, a village consisting of a single row of houses on either side of a two-lane macadam road in the northern reaches of the Laborec valley in northeastern Slovakia, not very far from the Polish border. And, like every Rusyn village no matter how poor, it has a handsome village church with a beautiful iconostasis inside.

The houses are square, stucco over stone or brick, single-story dwellings with sheet metal roofs. The small plots of ground on which they sit are rural and functional. On them might be found primitive outbuildings, a hay pile, a cow or two, chickens, a vegetable garden, fruit trees, and spectacular roses and other ornamental flowers. The scythe reigns supreme as a universal tool. We did not see a single lawn mower either in Slovakia or in Transcarpathia. Electricity is available in the village, but there is no common water supply or sewage system.

Čabiny seems relatively unchanged except that some houses now stand empty. The population, about a thousand in its prime, is today reduced to about 400, mostly pensioned older folk. Čabiny suffers the fate of all the remote Rusyn villages. The young, who want skills, an education, good jobs, a higher standard of living, and more options for sports and recreation, have forsaken the villages for the towns and cities. Hence, the villages remain frozen in time, projecting an aura of tradition, charm, and nostalgia that interests mainly the chronicler, the relative searching for roots, and the tourist.

We left Čabiny reluctantly. Our brief visit was over, even though there was still so much yet to savor. But that would have to await a future time. On our way to Michalovce, we made a stopover in Humenné for a ritual visit to the home of my first cousin, Anna Donicová Sedláková, and her family. Then we continued on to Michalovce where we spent the night at the apartment of Dr. Vladimir Ferko, a radiologist, his wife, Tatiana, a teacher and their two sons, Vladimir and Ivan. We spent the next day viewing the landmarks of Michalovce, shopping, and visiting at the Hlínskýs’ home. We parted in tears, promising to return again soon.

On June 28, our tour reached Prague, our final destination. There, we briefly visited with my first cousin, Fedor Kumčák, JUDr. He has lived and worked in Prague all of his professional life and presently works for the Ministry of the Environment of the Czech Republic.

Our trip was finally over and we were on our way back to America. Thoughts of the homeland continued to stay with us even after we landed on this side of the Atlantic. Within a few weeks, I received a letter from my first cousin, Anna Sedláková, who summed up best what we all felt: “For me, your visit seemed like an unbelievable dream. However, I have the feeling that there will be a visit again and that it will be somewhat longer.”