FROM THE EDITOR

In this year’s Carpatho-Rusyn American we have been presenting a series of articles on the topic of Jews in Subcarpathian Rus’ as seen through the eyes of various authors. In our spring issue (C-RA, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1994), Susan Slyomovics spoke of a personal odyssey to her family’s homeland in the former Hungarian Kingdom’s county of Máramaros in Subcarpathian Rus’. She discussed the preservation of Subcarpathian Jewry’s memory in the form of the Máramoros House synagogue in Tel Aviv, in the memorializing activities of Jewish immigrants in New York and Tel Aviv, and in the intriguing tales of the miracle-working rabbi of Máramaros, Rebbele Mordkhele of Buštino. Harm Ramkema of the Netherlands then provided historical information on the Jewish population of Subcarpathian Rus’ and introduced us to some of the complexities of Jewish politics in the region before World War II (C-RA, Vol. XVII, No. 2, 1994), specifically the relationship between the Zionist Jewish People’s party and the Orthodox Jewish Democratic party.

In the present issue, Henry Abramson, a Canadian of Jewish background, offers an interpretive essay on Jews in Subcarpathian Rus’ and the Holocaust. Drawing on a number of recently-published studies, he discusses several issues related to Jews in the Carpathians. He explores, for instance, the nature and function of the “memorial books,” or Yizker-bikher created by emigrants and Holocaust survivors in an effort to preserve the past, and most importantly, to mourn the tragedy of the Holocaust and honor the deceased members of the Jewish community. He then concentrates on the demographics of Subcarpathian Jewry in the years just before World War II. Finally, he raises the question of Rusyn collaboration and the degree to which they supposedly cooperated in handing over Jews to the Hungarian authorities during the deportation of Jews from Carpatho-Rusyn areas in the spring of 1944.

The question of collaboration, voluntary or forced, is a difficult one throughout Europe. It has been an especially painful problem with regard to Vichy France, Italy, and several East European countries such as Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Among all of these, however, Subcarpathian Rus’ has traditionally been singled out as an exception, particularly in Eastern Europe. As Abramson and other researchers note, no pogroms ever took place there. Moreover, memoirs and historical studies provide much evidence that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Rusyn-Jewish relations were peaceful and harmonious. While Jews owned some of the small businesses in the region, they also worked the land in large numbers just like their Rusyn neighbors. In that regard, nature did not differentiate between Jewish and non-Jewish farmers. Good harvests for some meant good harvests for all, and in a bad season everyone went hungry. I recall, for example, that my maternal grandmother, who emigrated from the Prešov Region on the threshold of World War I, had only a high regard and admiration for her Jewish neighbors. For instance, popular belief in her village insisted that if one dreamt about a Jewish neighbor, that meant good fortune was on the way. Her positive attitude seems to have reflected precisely this historically-attested positive and symbiotic relationship between the two peoples.

The European world my grandparents left behind changed considerably, however, before and during World War II. That war undermined relationships of trust, shattered families and friendships, and irrevocably overturned the ordinary dynamic of daily life. Nazi ideology categorized the peoples of Europe according to what they believed were definable racial characteristics. Germanic peoples, most especially Scandinavians, were considered Aryans, the most acceptable racial ideal. The Slavs, on the other hand, were categorized as Untermenschen or “subhumans.” They were at best intended for hard labor to fulfill the needs of the “master” Aryan races. Gypsies and Jews, as “anti-humans,” were singled out for physical annihilation. Regardless of status, representatives of all these peoples were drawn into and destroyed by the Nazi murder machine. Whether forcibly removed from their homes, physically abused and murdered, or forever psychologically traumatized, all were victimized. In the terrifying uncertainty of the time, there were no doubt moments of both courage and cowardice on the part of all the victims. Yet, for the vast majority the concepts “courageous” and “cowardly” lose their meaning in the face of Nazi terror and destruction. In studying issues of the Nazi occupation in relation to specific groups of occupied peoples, we must decide whether it is productive to repeat the pattern of “categorizing” the victims and survivors, in this case, as courageous or cowardly in their response to the aggressor.

The issue here of collaboration specifically on the part of Rusyns, however, is not resolved. Some Jewish writers say there was no collaboration: others suspect that the persecution stories of “anguished survivors” may contain legitimate tales of actual collaboration. Abramson suggests that because charges of betrayal are made by “anguished” survivors in the memorial books and elsewhere, they must be analyzed with great care. This is because there is an ever-present danger that the perceptions wrought by the agony of the moment are believed by others as accurate assessments of the events. At the same time, there exist reports of active protection and aid extended by Rusyns to Jews. These also must be studied. Presently, there are no scholarly studies of these issues. In light of this absence, Abramson notes, a “true and complete picture of how Rusyns reacted to the murder of their longstanding Jewish neighbors awaits its description.”

With the opening up of Eastern European historical archives on World War II, especially regarding the sensitive areas of collaboration and resistance, Subcarpathian Rus’ will also be studied. In Tel Aviv, for instance, there is a Society of Jews from Máramaros which has recently collected funds in order to establish a research program at the University of Tel Aviv on Subcarpathian Jewry. This program will scrutinize the relationships among Jews, Rusyns, and other groups who lived in this multiethnic area before and during the war. Researchers in the program have already contacted the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center in order to cooperate with them in their research. It is hoped that the Tel Aviv program, as well as others that might follow elsewhere, will be able to provide an accurate and meaningful historical depiction of the life of Subcarpathian Jews and their neighbors.
Throughout his priestly ministry and scholarly career, Father John Slivka faithfully and steadfastly adhered to the same ethnic and religious identifications with which he had grown up. During the first decade of his life, many Carpatho-Rusyns in America were becoming Orthodox “Russians,” due to the proselytization of Father Alexis Toth. The further erosion of a Rusyn identification was encouraged by the Amerikansky russky viestnik, the influential organ of the Greek Catholic Union whose editors and leading writers were Russophiles promoting a Russian identification. Also, the leaders of the new Orthodox diocese (established in 1938 under Bishop Orestes Chornock) rejected Moscow and Rome and called themselves Carpatho-Russians. Father Slivka, however, was always a Rusyn. He also opposed confusion over ecclesiastical terms; for example, he rejected Byzantine and clung to the term preferred by most immigrants, Greek Catholic.

John Slivka was born in Jessup, Pennsylvania, in 1899. His parents, John and Susan (Sokol), were from Carpatho-Rusyn villages in the Hungarian counties of Zemplin and Šariš (present-day Slovakia) and immigrated to the anthracite region. While various Slavic and other ethnic groups in the Scranton area lived near each other, each maintained its own customary rituals. Jessup’s Rusyns travelled to Olyphant and Scranton for Greek Catholic liturgies or worshiped in local Latin-rite churches. Rusyn ethnic identity was strengthened due to contact and contrast with groups with different cultures. In 1899, the year of Slivka’s birth, Jessup established its own parish church. It is not insignificant, in light of Father Slivka’s subsequent preferences, that the church’s charter contained the term Greek Catholic.

Slivka’s seminary training took place in the multiethnic city of Užhorod in the newly-established Czechoslovakia. Unlike several men before and after who attended American Latin-rite institutions, he was part of a new generation of American-reared students educated in European Greek Catholic seminaries. Following the Greek Catholic tradition still permitted by the church at that time, he married Anna Shereghy, the daughter of a priest, shortly before his ordination by Bishop Basil Takach on March 28, 1926, in Homestead, Pennsylvania. Father Slivka’s first Divine Liturgy was celebrated in Jessup.

Father Slivka appears not to have taken an active role in the celibacy struggle of the 1930s, although given his traditionalism he must certainly have opposed the new discipline. During those years he served in several parishes in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. After assignments in Whiting, Indiana and Yonkers, New York, he was appointed pastor of St. Elias Greek Catholic Church in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn.

It was in Brooklyn that he produced most of his scholarly and popular works. These include: Rusin-English Dictionary (1963), English-Rusin Dictionary (1973), numerous catechetical and devotional pamphlets, and several studies on culture and history. Extremely interesting is the short essay, “Who Are We?” (1977), in which he argues on linguistic grounds in favor of a Rusyn identity by contrasting the Rusyn language with that of the Eastern Slovaks. He also reminds us that the ecclesiastic term Byzantine was hardly ever used in the United States until the 1940s. The essay mentioned thirty ethnic and religious terms, most of which Slivka found both confusing and erroneous. In another volume, The History of the Greek Rite Catholics in Pannonia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Podkarpatska Rus’ 863-1949 (1974), Slivka argued that the Rusyns were in Pannonia before the Magyars arrived in 896. About half of this book contains material on the territorial grievances in Eastern Slovakia, the autonomy issue, and forced Czechization during the interwar years. Particularly difficult to locate is his “The History of St. Elias Catholic Church, Greek Slavonic Rite,” which appeared in 1966 in the church’s seventy-fifth anniversary program. In this piece, Slivka did not omit the problem of Latinization. Slivka’s magnum opus was a collection of documents entitled, Historical Mirror, Sources of the Rusin and Hungarian Greek Rite Catholics in the United States of America 1884-1963 (1978). This compilation of 177 hard-to-locate documents, several of which reflect crucial turning points in Rusyn-American church history, is of lasting significance.

Father John Slivka died in Brooklyn on November 1, 1986. As pastor of St. Elias, he was respected for his piety and sound fiscal management as well as for his scholarship. His last will and testament requested that the burial liturgy be in Church Slavonic. Father Slivka was and always will be a Rusyn!

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COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY: JEWS, RUSYNS, AND THE HOLOCAUST

In the following article, Dr. Henry Abramson of the University of Toronto explores topics presented in several books on Carpathian Jewry listed below that were published in Israel and the United States during the past three decades.—Editor


A moving Hebrew prayer with the title, “The Holy Ones of Kaszony and Surroundings,” is included by Joseph Eden in The Jews of Kaszony, Subcarpathia immediately preceding the alphabetical list of those murdered by the Nazis:

The holy ones, who were killed, and those who were burned, torn up, and buried alive at the hands of the Nazis and their helpers—they were the righteous, people of generous character and people of faith, schoolchildren, even young babies—they should find their rest in the Garden of Eden.

Master of Mercy, gather up their souls in the bonds of life. You are their heritage, preserve for us their suffering, and elevate us and all Jews in their merit.

May the land not cover up their blood, let there be no place where their cries are not heard.

In their merit may all Jews return to their portion, and the holy ones be remembered always, may their righteousness be before Your eyes, so that peace should be upon them and they should rest easily.

Amen.

This prayer is evocative of many of the themes prominent in the genre of the Yizker-bikher, or “memorial book,” a popular medium for expressing grief over the tremendous loss and dislocation brought about by the Holocaust. Written by survivors and descendants of survivors, these memorial books have an important function for Holocaust survivors and their descendants in that they attempt to deal with the psychological impact of the physical annihilation of past generations through an often-idealized depiction of their existence in Eastern Europe. The memorial books also serve as a method by which the regional identities of the remnants of these Jewish communities, transplanted for the most part in North America and Israel, may be preserved before the threat of assimilation to the host culture.

Several Yizker-bikher have been written on Subcarpathian Rus’ and its localities, most recently the first volume of Rabbi Shlomo Rozman’s projected series, The Book of the Beauty of the Ancient Mountains. Written for popular consumption, the Yizker-bikher vary considerably in their adherence to the stringencies of modern scholarship. Some, like Yehuda Erez’s contribution to the Encyclopaedia of the Diaspora series, are highly scholarly and supported with ample documentation in several languages. Others are more liturgical in quality, and although in many ways they come much closer to describing the abject terror of the Holocaust, their concern for modern, critical, historical analysis is less pronounced. To date, Dov Dinur’s brief study, Shoat yehudei Rusyah ha-Karpatit—Uzhhorod (The Holocaust of the Jews of Carpathian Rus’—Uzhhorod), remains the most important scholarly monograph on the topic. Several graduate students in Israel, however, are currently working on related dissertations.

Like the prayer cited above, an essential element in the Yizker-bikher is the maintenance of what seems to be an unusual but fundamental self-contradiction. On the one hand, the Yizker-bikher implore the Master of Mercy to grant the victims of the Holocaust a peaceful rest in the afterlife, while on the other hand they demand that “the land not cover up their blood, let there be no place where their cries are not heard.” How can both be maintained simultaneously?

A peaceful rest requires the satiation of either vengeance or forgiveness—perhaps even both—but it is clear that eternal rest is inconsistent with eternal lamentation. The synthesis of these two polarities is rooted in the statement: “preserve for us their suffering [literally: remind us of their bondage] and elevate us and all Jews in their merit.” For their horrible deaths to have meaning, they must act as a rallying cry for Jewish self-consciousness, alarmingly threatened by the demographic upheaval of the Holocaust and the subsequent dispersion of survivors from their homeland in new, more secular climes. While wishing on the innocents a peaceful rest, the survivors plead that the memory of their murder not be removed from subsequent generations, to act as a glue to bind together the dispersed fragments of the Jewry of Subcarpathian Rus’.

Idealizing the memory of the martyred Jews is, however, only one part of the inarticulate strategy of the Yizker-bukh. Exploring the malice and cruelty of the tormentors also has a tremendous potential for demanding allegiance to regional identities among the survivors and, more importantly, their descendants in North America and Israel. In fact, this aspect may prove to be even more effective among later generations than the appeal to the innocence of the victims. The essence of their righteousness, after all, was rooted in a high degree of observance of traditional Jewish ritual and strict adherence to the ethical principles of that faith. For their immigrant descendants, many of whom were raised in incomparably more secular environments, concentration on this central aspect of the victims’ lives may have the undesired effect of increasing ‘survivors’ guilt,’ as they increasingly reject this level of religious observance, preferring the
more American or Israeli lifestyle over their Subcarpathian heritage. In this sense, they are repudiating the core values and belief system of the ancestors in whose name they demand satisfaction. Relying on the mobilizing power inherent in righteous indignation, concentration on the depravity of the Nazis and their collaborators may supplant long panegyrics on the religious identification of the murdered ones. Thus, the Holocaust becomes a surrogate religion of sorts for American and Israeli Jewry—powerful enough to demand adherence to the in-group, yet negative enough to require few physical demands on its practitioners.

It is in this sense that the phrase, "may the land not cover up their blood, let there be no place where their cries are not heard," gains its full meaning. The Hebrew reader will recognize the allusion to Genesis 4:10, when Cain is questioned about his brother's murder: "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground." Cain is subsequently punished with eternal wandering, yet his safety is assured with a special mark which prevents others from murdering him. Thus the villain must remain, alive and ubiquitous, to remind others perpetually of his crime against Abel. Similarly, the perpetrators of the Holocaust must remain in memory, particularly when the gentleness of the shepherd Abel is a concern no longer relevant to his descendants.

The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' were the last medieval Jews of the western world. Unlike the more cosmopolitan parts of the continent, the Jews of this region lived in an island of traditional mores and lifestyles that was much more isolated from secularizing influences than any other area of Jewish settlement in East Central Europe, as amply detailed in Rabbi Rosman's work. This is not to say that this community of 100,000 Jews, about one-fourth of the total population of the region, representing roughly one-third of the Jews in Czechoslovakia, was completely cut off from the flow of history. Zionism, for example, did make significant inroads among the youth of Subcarpathian Rus'. Nevertheless, these Jews were far more reluctant to dive into the irreligious twentieth century than Jews in other areas. In the rest of Czechoslovakia, for example, intermarriage rates among Jews were higher: thirty percent in Bohemia, nineteen percent in Moravia, and even five percent in the strict Jewish community in Slovakia. By way of contrast, the rate in the Subcarpathian region was a paltry 0.9 percent. The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus', moreover, overwhelmingly identified themselves as Jews by nationality. The 1921 census reveals that only 53.6 percent of Czechoslovakian Jewry declared their nationality as Jewish, the bulk of the remainder identifying themselves as Czechs (21.8%), Germans (14.3%), or Hungarians (8.5%). In Bohemia, only 14.6 percent of Jews declared themselves Jewish by nationality, whereas Jews in other regions were somewhat more inclined to consider their nationality identical with their religious affiliation (Moravia 47.8%; Slovakia 54.2%). In Subcarpathian Rus', however, as high as 86.8 percent of Jews considered themselves Jews by nationality, a figure well above the national average.

Their extreme adherence to tradition and strong Jewish self-consciousness were not the only distinguishing features of Subcarpathian Jewry. Unlike the general Eastern European pattern of Jewish settlement, Subcarpathian Jewry was far more rural than urban. Statistics from 1921, for example, indicate that sixty-five percent of Subcarpathian Jewry lived in villages with a population of less than 5,000. Almost half of the Jews in Bohemia, by way of contrast, lived in the city of Prague. Corresponding with this pattern of settlement, the Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' were much more heavily involved in farming and related agricultural occupations, such as beekeeping, than commerce or artisanry. The poverty of these rural Jews was considerable: an American Joint Distribution Committee study of the area conducted in 1921 determined that fully forty percent of Subcarpathian Jewry was reliant on communal charities for income. Even the distribution by age group was further differentiated between Jews in Subcarpathian Rus' and elsewhere in Czechoslovakia. In western regions of the country, the Jewish population was aging faster than the non-Jewish population, whereas the Jewish population in the far east was virtually identical by age group to the indigenous Rusyns, indicating similar socio-economic contours as well as lifestyle choices.

In the cities, however, Subcarpathian Jewry conformed to the more common pattern for urbanized Jewry in other parts of East Central Europe. Jews constituted roughly a third of the population of the major cities; Mukačevo was a major Jewish center where in 1910 Jews formed nearly half of the population. Although the urbanized Jews had been drifting steadily towards a Magyar orientation during the pre-World War I period—in Uzhhorod, for example, 41.3 percent of the inhabitants called Hungarian their mother tongue in 1890, and by 1910 thatfigure had jumped to 82 percent—the establishment of the new state of Czechoslovakia prompted the urbanized elements to rethink their cultural orientations. Subsequently, a certain drift towards Slovak and, to a lesser degree, Hebrew and Czech, as a standard medium for communication is discernible in this period. While the vernaculars of rural Subcarpathian Jewry continued to be Yiddish and Rusyn, Jews were not enthusiastic supporters of the new Rusyn school system. Jews were looking to provide their children with the most advantageous education possible (and they did this with zeal, so that in 1920-21, Jews constituted seventy-two percent of the student population of the region), and Slovak and Czech provided greater opportunities for advancement. Moreover, the nationalistic atmosphere of the Rusyn schools put parents off, as one author illustrated with the example of a Jewish child reciting to his concerned Orthodox parents the lines from Duchnový that he had learned in his Rusyn class: "I was, am, and will be a Rusyn/I will not forget my honorable lineage/And will remain its son. My mother and father were Rusyn, as were my whole family."

In a way, the conflict between Rusyns and Subcarpathian Jewry over the educational system is a reflection of the greater tensions between the communities during the interwar period. Both groups welcomed Czechoslovakia's democracy with enthusiasm yet soon found themselves vying with each other for favor with the new, paternalistic government in Prague. Moreover, the separatist tendencies of the Magyars in the region and the demands for greater autonomy by the Rusyns alienated the Jewish population, which strove to maintain and develop ties with the central Czechoslovak authorities. The orientation of the Jews towards the center was traditional and may be observed in many other regions and periods of Jewish history. As a minority, the Jews have sought to support the powers that are most likely to maintain a Rechtsstaat, or society governed by law and order, and revolutionary change is ipso facto always inconsistent with the maintenance of order. The Magyar orientation, though fashionable for these reasons in the pre-war period, lost a considerable degree of Jewish
support after the savage pogroms of the "White Terror" which in Hungary followed the toppling of the Kun regime in the summer of 1919.

The Rusyns were also dissatisfied with their treatment at the hands of the Czechoslovak government, and many moved towards the Ukrainianophile orientation—though not necessarily irredentism—in the later 1930s. This turn to the Galician form of interwar Ukrainian nationalism was disturbing to Subcarpathian Jewry, as the influence of Nazi ideology was pronounced in the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and other Ukrainian right-wing groups. While antisemitism was only a small part of the OUN's overall platform, it was certainly not inconsequential, and it added to the tensions developing between Jews and Rusyns in the interwar period. The Ukrainian and Ukrainianophile nationalists understood the Czechoslovak orientation of Subcarpathian Jews in a decidedly negative manner. Jews were seen as perennial detractors of the Ukrainian cause, always seeming to defect to Ukraine's enemies, be they Russians, Poles, or Czechs.

Those Rusyns who were Ukrainianophiles were to take the leading role in the immediate pre-war environment. Following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia forced by the Nazis in October 1938, the Ukrainianophiles set up (initially with the assistance of the Russophiles) the first autonomous government in Subcarpathian Rus', later calling it Carpatho-Ukraine. These developments from the new capital of Chust were alarming to the Jewish community. One memoir records that Jews were afraid to travel after hours, since "non-Jews were going about in the streets like drunkards, screaming dire threats against Jews and their businesses." The Nazis took advantage of their own popularity, in particular among the Ukrainians active in the region, and sponsored an antisemitic campaign directed at rousing the Rusyns against their Jewish neighbors. More ominously, Ukrainians in Chust are said to have openly prepared "blacklists" of wealthy Jews, an activity which was consistent with the Nazi pattern of "arization," or confiscation of Jewish property. Although aryanization was typically a first stage in what was to become the murder process, Carpatho-Ukraine was too short-lived to be further involved. Hungarian troops crossed the border and occupied the entire region in March 1939, after which it was renamed Carpathia (Hungarian: Karpatalja).

Approximately 90,000 of the over 100,000 Jews of Subcarpathian Rus' were murdered at the hands of the Hungarians and the Nazis. The destruction of these Jews conformed to a pattern that was common for many countries in Eastern Europe. It began with a definition of the term Jew, proceeded to confiscation of property, then ghettization, and finally deportation to death camps. The Hungarian government, like several other states in the region, drew distinctions between Jews who were citizens of Hungary, Jews from areas recently acquired by Hungary, and Jews who were refugees from other countries, the latter being the first to be murdered. In the summer of 1941, some 20,000 Jews who had found refuge in Subcarpathian Rus' were deported to neighboring Galicia, which was part of the Nazi territory of the Generalgouvernement in former Poland and the destination of thousands of Jewish deportees. The military governor of Galicia, however, refused to accept these Jews. This was rather typical of the confusion and disagreement characteristic of the Nazi Jewish policies at the time. The result was that some 12,500 of these deportees were simply shot by SS units at Kamjanec'-Podil's'kyj. This approach seemed to have some popularity among elements in both the German and Hungarian regimes, and several more requests for such deportations were entertained in following years. Adolf Eichmann, Hitler's expert on the "Jewish question," demurred, waiting until a more comprehensive plan could be put into place. Meanwhile, ghettos were established for Jews in Mukačevo (Munkács), Košice (Kassa), Uzhhorod (Ungvár), Chust (Huszta), Sevoljus (Nagyszollos), Berehovo (Beregzsász), and other locales, and Jews were occasionally rounded up for forced labor in Ukraine.

It was not until May 1944 that the mass deportations began. Subcarpathian Rus' was designated Deportation Zone I. Within three weeks, the majority of Subcarpathian Jewry had been gassed and burned in the infamous death camp called Auschwitz.

What was the role of the Rusyns in this terrible history? While Carpatho-Ukraine existed (October 1938—March 1939), no Jews were murdered. Nonetheless, the fledgling state did adopt Jewish policies that were ominously threatening to the future of Subcarpathian Jewry. To repeat, however, Carpatho-Ukraine came to an end before anything more concrete might have occurred, indeed before a single Jew was murdered. It is also worth mentioning that the Rusyns were not in the least a trusted ally of the Hungarians, as their claims for autonomy conflicted with Magyar demands. Thus, a Magyar-Rusyn collaboration to murder the Jews was highly unlikely, at least in a formal, administrative sense.

On an informal level, however, how did the Rusyns behave towards their Jewish neighbors? One source cited by Gross and Cohen in the Sefer Maramarosh describes Rusyn cooperation in the roundup of Jews (referring to them as "the searchdogs of the Hungarian gendarmes") with the bitterness of betrayal:

This is a great source of pain. This nation, the Ruthenian-Ukrainian of Maramaros, which was raised alongside and together with Jews during the previous seven or eight generations, betrayed its neighbor in times of trouble in a low, cruel and ugly manner . . . How was it that they did not pass the test on the day of trial? How did they hand over hunted Jews, entire families with their wives and children, to the Hungarian foe, which was the enemy of the Ruthenian people, as well, in exchange for a quart of liquor? Oh, Ruthenian nation, how low you stooped, down to the very depths. You betrayed your neighbor for a pittance!!! (pp. 39-40)

Little research has been done on Subcarpathian Rus' as a whole and still less on the behavior of Rusyns during the Holocaust, and these charges have yet to receive the attention of the scholarly community. The Yizker-bikher provide considerable anecdotal evidence, however, of Rusyns exposing Jews in hiding to the Hungarian murder machine, often in exchange for some sort of bribe. This is not to say that individual cases of protecting Jews are not also recorded, including a rare example of an entire community of Rusyns in Košel'ovo acting to protect the Jews, even supporting them with food in the ghetto. Nevertheless, these examples remain the distinct minority. On the other hand, the memoirs are unanimous in describing the idyllic relationship between Jews and Rusyns in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. For example, Joachim Schoenfeld in his Shtetl Memoirs (1985) writes fondly of his youthful trips into the Carpathians:
The Hutzuls (Ruthenian mountaineers) who were in the mountains for the entire summer tending their sheep in the polominas ([upland] pastures) were very hospitable people, and anyone who came up to them was always welcome to find shelter in their coliba [hut], to sleep on fresh hay alongside the watra (watchfire). Whoever came to their hut was also invited to share in their meal, which consisted of manaliga (corn bread cooked in salted water to a hard consistency) with bryndza (sheep cheese) and milk. They didn’t ask for payment but were more than happy if they were rewarded with pipe tobacco, which they couldn’t afford to buy. . . . The evenings were spent with the Hutzuls, listening to their tales about Dobosh (a kind of Robin Hood), and the miracles performed by the svaty Srułko, the Saint Israel, i.e. the Bal Shem Tov, whom even Dobosh revered and admired. (pp. 130-131)

This passage, typical of descriptions of pre-World War I Jewish-Rusyn relations, is indicative of a high degree of cultural cross-fertilization (linguistic and even religious) and generally paints a portrait two peoples in harmonious symbiosis. Even the work of Gross and Cohen, which is particularly strident in its accusations against the Rusyns, refers to Jewish and Rusyn children playing together as well as the use by Rusyns of Jewish Rabbinical courts and Jewish midwives.

How can this paradox of Jewish-Rusyn relations be understood? How can two peoples who apparently coexisted so placidly for generations suddenly be reduced to such depths in a matter of a generation? In the absence of more sophisticated scholarship, a comprehensive answer which takes into account the regional peculiarities of Subcarpathian Rus’ is unavailable. A more general understanding of the problem, however, based on the paradigm of the Belarusans, Ukrainians, and the Baltic peoples, seems to be useful at least to some degree. Simply put, like these peoples the Rusyns increasingly viewed themselves as dominated by foreign powers during the interwar period and looked with admiration to the rapid reconstruction of Germany under Hitler, perceiving him as a saviour from Communist hegemony. The influence of Ukrainian political émigrés from Galicia was certainly instrumental in fostering this attitude, particularly during the brief existence of Carpatho-Ukraine.

On the other hand, this simplistic understanding of the problem is deeply unsatisfactory. It fails to explain the deeper human dimension of the problem, which is more concerned with what is described as the mass betrayal of Jews by their longstanding neighbors, a topic which has been treated to some degree in the historiography of western nations although to a lesser degree of the east. Furthermore, the charges of betrayal have to be adequately quantified, as they were put forward by the anguished survivors whose experience of extreme persecution must be taken into account. To cite Gross and Cohen, for example: “It is not our intention to say that the Rusyn people, down to the very last individual, were all guilty, yet ‘the majority may be considered as the entirety’.” The basis for this statement must have been the absence of rescue, which is fundamentally a representation of compliance, apathy, or at least a feeling of helplessness on the part of the Rusyns. Active collaboration in the form of revealing hidden Jews to the Hungarians is another matter altogether, and while it is widely asserted that this took place, it is difficult at this stage in our historical knowledge to determine accurately the extent of this phenomenon. While some scholars have studied Subcarpathian Rus’ during the Holocaust years, few have considered Rusyn-Jewish relations. They instead focus on Hungarian-Jewish relations, since the Hungarians were in charge of directing the murder process. A true and complete picture of how Rusyns reacted to the murder of their longstanding Jewish neighbors awaits its description by historical scholarship.

The Yizker-bikher reviewed here, however, are not dedicated solely to the accurate representation of the Holocaust in all its details and complexities. Their purpose is to act as both a memorial to the martyred innocent ones as well as a bond to bring their descendants closer to the Jewish community. As the American-Israeli definition of Jewishness becomes less and less religious, the emphasis on the innocence and piety of the murdered Jewry of Subcarpathian Rus’ may become less prevalent, its place taken by concentration on the cruelty of the Rusyns. Unfortunately, this development does not bode well for future research in this troubling and tragic period in Jewish-Rusyn relations. While renewed study of primary sources (interviews with survivors, German and Hungarian military documents, etc.) promise to advance significantly the current state of historical knowledge surrounding this tragic period of Jewish-Rusyn relations, it may have little impact on the portrait of the era painted in the Yizker-bikher, which often have an internal dynamic of their own, independent of the scholarly world.

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JEWES IN CARPATHIAN RUS’ TODAY

Since the revolutionary changes of the late 1980s, the remnants of the Jewish community in the Carpathians have begun to reorganize. In Subcarpathian Rus’ (Ukraine’s Transcarpathia), there are an estimated 3,500 Jews organized in eight communities in the cities and towns of Užhorod, Mukachevo, Berehovo, Vynohradiv, Svaljava, Tjáciv, Chust, and Jasinja. Each community functions independently and has its own synagogue, although at present none has its own rabbi. Since 1991, the Jews of Transcarpathia also have their own civic organization, the Menora Society of Jewish Culture, which together with the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns is a member of the region’s board of national minorities.

In the neighboring Lemko Region of Poland, the former Jewish presence is remembered through the establishment of a Memorial Room of Jewish Culture at the Museum of Lemko Culture at Zydronowa, a small Carpatho-Rusyn village near the Dukla pass. The Jewish memorial room was opened in June 1994 at the initiative of Fedir Goć, founder of the Museum of Lemko Culture. It is located in a small house that before World War II belonged to Zalman Polster, who with his entire family perished in the German death camps. The dilapidated Jewish home was restored with funds and labor supplies provided by the Orthodox bishop of Sanok-Przemysl, Adam Dubec, the village of Zydronowa, and members of the local Orthodox parish and museum committee.
THE CARPATHO-RUSYN RESEARCH CENTER AND CZECHO-SLOVAKIA

The following text was delivered at the opening plenary session of the 17th World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences held in Prague in June. 1994.—Editor

In 1990, aside from the nearly 1.9 million Americans who claimed Slovak ancestry and the 1.3 million who claimed Czech ancestry, there were 315,000 Americans who said they were of “CzechoSlovakian” ancestry. It is likely that many, if not most, of those 315,000 “CzechoSlovaks” were themselves or had parents or grandparents who were actually Carpatho-Rusyns.

I mention this statistical data to underline the fact that the CzechoSlovakia idea is alive and well among thousands of people in North America and that it is in large part promoted by Carpatho-Rusyns. Regardless whether Rusyn Americans identify themselves as Carpatho-Rusyns, Rusnaks, Ruthenians, or Carpatho-Russians, if they come from south of the Carpathians they generally would say that their country or the country of their parents and grandparents is CzechoSlovakia. This includes even those Rusyn Americans whose parents were born in the Austro-Hungarian empire, and who therefore were technically never even on CzechoSlovak territory, as well as those whose forebears came from what is today the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine.

It is not difficult to discover why CzechoSlovakia has been and continues to be so close to the hearts of Rusyn Americans. First of all—and this fact is often forgotten by our Czech and Slovak brethren—the Carpatho-Rusyns were one of the founding peoples of CzechoSlovakia. And since Rusyns historically never had their own state, their first country became CzechoSlovakia. Moreover, they joined the new CzechoSlovak state with high hopes, because during his travels in the United States in 1918, Professor Tomáš Masaryk promised Rusyn Americans that they would be granted autonomy and be able to rule themselves. The Rusyn-American connection with the homeland was at the time so close that when Masaryk became CzechoSlovakia’s first president he appointed an American citizen, the young Rusyn leader Gregory Žatkovyc, to be the first governor of Subcarpathian Rus’.

Many who are familiar with the history of CzechoSlovakia know that the promises of autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus’, which were guaranteed by international law (Treaty of St. Germain) and inscribed in the CzechoSlovak constitution, were never fully realized during the first CzechoSlovak republic. Less well known, but also true, is that the organized Rusyn-American community protested vigorously during the 1920s and 1930s to the CzechoSlovak government, to the League of Nations, and to other international organizations, reminding them of Prague’s refusal to grant the promised autonomy to Subcarpathian Rus’.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that during World War II, when Subcarpathian Rus’ was occupied by Horthy’s Hungary, Rusyn-American leaders like former governor Žatkovyc who had for almost twenty years protested against the Prague government, nonetheless joined with CzechoSlovakia’s government-in-exile, headed by Edward Beneš and Jan Masaryk, in an effort to free the common homeland of Czechs, Slovaks, and Rusyns. It should also come as no surprise that when the war ended and Subcarpathian Rus’ was annexed to the Soviet Union, the Rusyn-American community’s largest religious and secular organizations immediately issued formal protests to the United States government and the newly-established League of Nations against what they considered the “forced annexation” of Subcarpathian Rus’ to the Soviet Union and the violation of the democratic desires of the Rusyn people to remain within their country—CzechoSlovakia.

While a few Rusyn Americans joined the Council for Free CzechoSlovakia in Exile and fewer still associated with the Ukrainian-American community, most lost all interest in the political fate of their ancestral homeland during the decades after World War II. There were two reasons for this: (1) the pre-World War I first immigrants were rapidly passing from the scene and their American-born or American-raised offspring were less interested in what was still fondly called the “old country”; and (2) the harshness of Soviet rule in Subcarpathian Rus’ and Communist rule in CzechoSlovakia effectively cut them off from communication of any kind with relatives in the Carpathians. The nearly four decades of separation from the European homeland had another very negative effect. Many descendents of Rusyn Americans lost all sense of their ancestral Rusyn heritage and identity and, at best, had only a vague awareness that their forbears had come from somewhere in a country called CzechoSlovakia.

It was to instill a new sense of Rusyn awareness in second-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation Rusyn Americans that the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center (C-RRC) was born in 1978. Founded exclusively by Americans born after World War II, who were partially or wholly of Rusyn ancestry, the C-RRC set out to reverse the lack of knowledge about the Rusyn homeland not only among Rusyn Americans themselves but among the larger American public. The center decided to achieve its goal not through political activity or lobbying the United States and other governments, but through a broadly based publication program, most often with the leading publishing houses in the United States, Canada, and western Europe. Since its establishment, the C-RRC has worked closely with the largest Rusyn-American religious and secular organizations, including the four dioceses of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church, the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church, and the Greek Catholic Union. At most these organizations comprise half of the estimated 620,000 Americans of Rusyn background.

For its part, the C-RRC is concerned with members of established Rusyn organizations as well as with those who have lost all formal ties with the community. The result has been to attract over 8,000 supporters and countless other
readers of the C-RRC’s publications worldwide, from North America, to most countries in Europe, and to places farther afield, like Israel, Japan, Taiwan, and Australia. The center’s quarterly, the Carpatho-Rusyn American, which has also appeared since 1978, is received by individual readers as well as by over 55 major libraries in North American and Europe. To end this brief review of statistics, it is worth noting that during its first 16 years of existence, the C-RRC has distributed 25,000 books and articles about all aspects of Rusyn history and culture by leading university publishers like Harvard, Columbia, Washington, and Toronto as well as to individuals and libraries in every state of the United States and over 45 countries abroad.

The C-RRC’s publications strive to reflect the historical record as accurately and impartially as possible. In that regard, the Rusyn relationship with Czechs and Slovaks and with the former country of Czechoslovakia is a frequent theme. On balance, the record of Rusyn relations with Czechs and Slovaks has been a positive one. As a result, the C-RRC, while being concerned primarily with promoting knowledge and scholarship, has at the same time functioned as a good-will ambassador for the Czechoslovak idea. This role has been made even easier by recent political developments.

The C-RRC, like most Rusyn-Americans, greeted with joy the news of the Velvet Revolution of November 1989. For the first time in over four decades, Rusyns of all generations in the United States could finally begin to restore once again normal relations with their families, friends, and organizations in northeastern Slovakia, and to a degree with Transcarpathia in Gorbachev’s reformed Soviet Union.

Of particular importance was the fact that in Czechoslovakia the Velvet Revolution did indeed fulfill its promise to restore a liberal democratic state concerned with human rights and the rule of law. The Greek Catholic Church was fully restored to its rightful juridical place, and in 1991 the Czechoslovak census accepted and recorded the designation Rusyn as a distinct nationality and language. The Czech and Slovak federal government and both republican governments also helped to establish new organizations and publications that supported the idea that Rusyns comprise a distinct nationality—such views had been forbidden during the Communist era—and in March 1991 the country hosted in Medzilaborce the First World Congress of Rusyns at which the C-RRC represented Rusyns from the United States. Rusyn Americans are pleased to note that these positive developments begun in post-1989 federal Czechoslovakia are being carried out further by the government of the republic of Slovakia with regard to the indigenous Rusyns living in the Prešov Region in the far northeastern part of the country, and by the government of the Czech Republic among Rusyns and their descendants who have lived for several decades in Prague and northern Moravia.

Therefore, it is quite natural that the C-RRC, to the degree that it promotes knowledge of Rusyn history and culture abroad, will continue as well to promote the good name of the Czech Republic and of Slovakia, in another words the good name of all Czechs, Slovaks, and Rusyns who together embody the Czechoslovak idea.

Paul Robert Magocsi
Toronto, Ontario

Patient: I was, am, and will remain a Rusyn.

Doctor to nurse: It’s hopeless, even though he’s already gotten a transfusion of five liters of pure Ukrainian blood!

(Cartoon by P. Petki, Užhorod, Ukraine)
RECENT EVENTS

Toronto, Ontario. On April 11, 1994, Professor Paul Robert Magocsi delivered a lecture sponsored by the Hungarian cultural society, Itt Ott, entitled: "Hungarians in Ukraine (Transcarpathia)." The discussion focused on the Hungarian demand for self-rule in that part of southern Transcarpathia where a Hungarian (Magyars) minority lives as well as on the general attitude of the Ukrainian government toward autonomy for Transcarpathia.

Vienna, Austria. On April 13, 1994, Robert C. Metil presented a lecture at an international conference on the traditional music of ethnic groups that was sponsored by the Institute for Folk Music Research in Vienna. His topic was "The Influence of Interethnic Conflicts and Cleavages on the Patronage and Performance Repertoire of the Rusyn-American Folk Ensemble 'Slavjane' of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania." Metil is a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh, and as part of his work he has been studying the work of the Slavjane Rusyn-American folk ensemble, a topic about which he also spoke on October 30, 1993 at the 38th annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi.

Medzilaborce, Slovakia. On May 13, 1994, a one-day scholarly conference was devoted to the life and career of Anatolij Kralyc'kyj (1835-1894), the late nineteenth-century Carpatho-Rusyn writer and national activist. The conference was sponsored by the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians in Slovakia (SRUS) and included sixteen speakers, most of whom discussed Kralyc'kyj in the context of Ukrainian culture. Only three of the speakers were from outside Slovakia: Reverend Atanasij Pekar (Rome), V. Jaremienko (Kiev), and V. Zadorožný (Úžhorod).

Sosnowiec, Poland. On May 20-21, 1994, the Institute of East Slavic Philology at the University of Silesia sponsored an international scholarly conference on mutual contacts in the development of Slavic languages. Four papers were delivered in Rusyn about the current status of the language: by Dr. Vasył' Jabur (Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture, Prešov), Dr. Jurij Pan'ko (Šafárik University, Prešov), Dr. Henryk Fontanski (University of Silesia), and Myroslava Chomjak (Uście Gorlickie, Poland). Among the commentators was Professor Premysl Adamec (Charles University, Prague), who noted that the present-day Rusyn language codifiers have returned "to a tradition that fifty years ago was unnaturally disrupted." The process of codifying the Rusyn language," he continued, "should be completed as soon as possible."

Minneapolis, Minnesota. On May 28, 1994, the Rusin Association of Minnesota sponsored a lecture-discussion by Professor Paul Robert Magocsi (University of Toronto) that dealt with the question of Rusyn-American identity in the past and present. He especially emphasized the role of the Minneapolis community in the growth of Orthodoxy in America and, as a result, the rise of a Russian identity among many Rusyn Americans.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The 38th Annual Pittsburgh Folk Festival was held May 27-29, 1994, with 25 nationality groups participating. Among those featured were Carpatho-Rusyns. Carpatho-Rusyn involvement was sponsored by the Slavjane Rusyn Folk Ensemble of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, and the new Carpatho-Rusyn Society of the Tri-State Area. The Carpatho-Rusyns organized a cultural display and heritage service, offered pysanky demonstrations, served Rusyn ethnic food in a cafe-style setting, and presented Rusyn songs and dances.

The theme of the festival was "Hats Off to the World," and featured headdresses of the various participating groups. The Rusyn exhibit included ritual, festive, and everyday headgear from the Lemko Region, the Prešov Region, and Transcarpathia. Displayed in addition were wedding headdresses, jasličky headgear, and kerchiefs or chustky worn during the various stages of a woman's life.

A highlight of the display was a chart listing the ten Carpatho-Rusyn villages that provided the greatest immigration to western Pennsylvania. A poster showed each village, the names of the families from that village that immigrated to the Pittsburgh area, and in which western Pennsylvania community each family settled. This demographic data, the work of Richard Custer of Pittsburgh’s Carpatho-Rusyn Society, was received enthusiastically by the numerous people of Rusyn background who stopped at the display.

The Slavjane Ensemble’s junior and senior groups presented two outstanding shows of Carpatho-Rusyn folksongs and dances, directed by Jack Poloka of McKees Rocks. The shows featured material from Rusyn villages of eastern Slovakia, some of it brought back by Dean Poloka, who studied the authentic dances with PUL’S, the professional Rusyn folk ensemble in Prešov, Slovakia.

Prague, Czech Republic. On June 26, 1994, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center was one of several organizations invited to participate in the opening plenary session, entitled "Mission and Work of Czechoslovak Exiles on Behalf of Their Native Land," of the 17th World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences held in Prague. Dr. Paul Robert Magocsi represented the C-RRC at the plenary session (see THE CARPATHO-RUSYN RESEARCH CENTER AND CZECHO-SLOVAKIA in this issue), and two days later another of his papers was presented on the topic, "The End of Czecho-Slovakia From the Rusyn Perspective."

YUGOSLAV RUSYN YOUTH FUND

The fund has begun to receive several donations for 1994. These include:

Amalija N. Fairbanks, MD, Birmingham, Alabama—$1,000
Elmer T. Lokkins and Gustavo A. Archilla, New York, New York—$50
Kirill Papuga, Edmonton, Alberta—$50
Vladimir Ruskai, Hamilton, Ontario—$100

This is a good start, but subsequent funds are still needed to fulfill the goal of this year’s program—to send a teacher of English to the high school in Ruskì Kereštìur toward the end of the 1994/1995 school year. Please be generous. Further tax deductible donations of $50 or more may be sent to:

Yugoslav Rusyn Youth Fund
Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, Inc.
Box 131-B
Orwell, Vermont 05670
Since the Revolution of 1989

Užhorod, Ukraine. On June 29, 1994, Professor Ivan Turjanycja, the chairman of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns and the prime minister of the Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus', was elected a member of Transcarpathia's parliament (Narodna Rada). He is one of seven deputies elected to the new Transcarpathian parliament who openly support the creation of an autonomous republic of Subcarpathian Rus' within Ukraine and the full recognition of Rusyns as a distinct nationality. Professor Turjanycja and his fellow pro-Rusyn deputies for the first time have access to an officially recognized platform from which to argue their views.

Zyndranowa, Poland. In June 1994, a new magazine about Carpatho-Rusyns began with the appearance of its first issue. Entitled Zahoroda (The Garden), the magazine is devoted to the past and present culture of Lemko Rusyns in Poland and is published by the Museum of Lemko Culture in Zyndranowa, founded in the 1970s by the long-time Lemko-Rusyn cultural activist, Fedir Goč (see Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. X, no. 2, Spring, 1987). The first issue was prepared by the Lemko-Rusyn writer, Volodyslav Hraban, with most of the articles in Lemko Rusyn and a few in Polish. Those interested in receiving or contributing to Zahoroda should write to: Muzeum Kultury Lemkowskiej w Zyndranowej, 38-454 Tylawa k/Dukli, POLAND.

Užhorod, Ukraine. During the second round of regional elections held in Ukraine in July 10, 1994, Serhij I. Ustyč (b. 1955) was elected chairman of the 51-member Transcarpathian parliament (Narodna Rada). A former university professor, in April 1994 he was elected one of Transcarpathia's deputies to the Ukrainian national parliament in Kiev. Ustyč is known to be a supporter of the idea of autonomy (self-rule) for Transcarpathia; he has spoken out strongly in favor of making the region a "free economic zone" within Ukraine; and he is understanding of the demands for having Rusyns recognized as a distinct nationality.

Rusyn Folk Music Available

Enjoy a treasury of 50 Carpatho-Rusyn songs and dances, produced by the Kruzhok folk art ensemble of Cleveland, Ohio, and entitled "Zaspivajme," "Let's Sing." Hear melodies to move your feet and lighten your spirit as you dance and sing along with this popular album for all ages. Included are Carpatho-Rusyn love songs, family songs, polkas, čardašes, waltzes, round dances (karičky), the Bear Dance, the Bottle Dance, children's favorites, humorous songs, wedding songs, and others. On two stereo cassettes, forty-four singers and a ten-piece folk art orchestra provide nearly two hours of Carpatho-Rusyn music. Cassettes are enclosed in a sturdy and handsome case. A sing-along songbook with complete Rusyn-to-English translations is included.

The song and dance melodies are collected from Rusyn immigrants and include American-Rusyn songs as well as songs of Rusyns in present-day Transcarpathia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Perfect for folksong and folkdance groups, families, and individuals who want to learn and enjoy Rusyn songs and dances.

The double-cassette album is $21.80, which includes postage. Extra sing-along books are $4.00, including postage. A 10% discount is offered for more than 10 song booklets. To order, send a check or money order (made out to Jerry J. Jumba) to Jerry J. Jumba, 312 Hamilton Street, McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania 15136.

Our Front Cover

Traditional Jewish shop in a village in Subcarpathian Rus' before World War II.

A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

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:

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