FROM THE EDITOR

A look back at the Rusyn community’s life in this past year shows that there have been some exceedingly positive moments, as well as some low points, but all-in-all the year ended on a high note. This “high note” may not have seemed the case as of the 1995 fall issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American. The editorial in the fall C-RA, in fact, spelled out the details of the Slovak government’s recent negative treatment of its Rusyn citizens, its reneging on official financial commitments made to the Rusyn community, its withholding of publications in Rusyn and about Rusyns, and among yet other points, its proposal that the “Rusyn problem” be “resolved.” In spite of all this, events which have taken place since the fall issue justify a cautious optimism.

Is it possible that some of the improvements are, at least in part, due to the strong letter of inquiry which the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center and six other Rusyn-American organizations sent to five ministers of the Slovak government, members of the Slovak parliament, Slovak newspapers in Bratislava, and the Slovak Embassy in Washington, D.C.? The inquiry expressed a shared concern that the present government of Slovakia appeared to be discriminating against the Rusyn community, and it outlined in seven points what forms this discrimination had taken in the past year (see AN INQUIRY, C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1995, pp. 4-5). We received more than one reply to the inquiry, and these responses appear in this issue of the C-RA.

Furthermore, in the opinion of Professor Vasyl’ Jabur, director of the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture and a member of the executive board of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, several very recent events may also indicate that some optimism is indeed appropriate. The Slovak Ministry of Culture has agreed to finance the January 1995 language codification celebration—an event which the government had promised to support but then subsequently refused to support. The ministry has also agreed not to block funds promised to the Rusyn Renaissance Society for pursuit of its cultural activity in the Rusyn community. Likewise, the Ministry of Education has accepted the proposal for a department of Rusyn Language and Literature at Safarik University in Prešov and has promised to act on this as quickly as possible. The Dean of the School of Education at the university will also urge the Accreditation Committee to move on approving the new department and its programs.

Contributing to the overall high note on which this year ended are the ceremony for the official codification of the Rusyn language held in Bratislava which began the year, several significant scholarly conferences which included discussions of Rusyns, the increasing number of entries on Rusyns as a distinct nationality in scholarly encyclopedic publications, and references to Rusyns and Rusyn reality by a leading Slavic linguist and even by some Ukrainian scholars.

First, the official codification of Prešov-Region Rusyn was recognized in a ceremony held in January 1995 in Bratislava. It was followed by a scholarly conference which discussed the history and nature of the Rusyn language (see C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 4-8). In August, the Fifth World Congress for Central and East European Studies took place at the University of Warsaw in Poland, which included three panels devoted specifically to Carpatho-Rusyns (see C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1995, p. 11). In October, the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies annual conference in Washington, D.C., devoted an entire panel to Rusyns, entitled “Carpatho-Rusyns: A New Slavic Nationality,” and sponsored a publication’s booth which displayed and sold Carpatho-Rusyn materials to dozens of scholars and visitors (see C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1995, p. 11).

The Third World Congress of Rusyns was held in May 1995 in Ruski Krstur in conjunction with the 250th anniversary of Rusyns in the Vojvodina in Yugoslavia. Not only did the Rusyn community there demonstrate the preservation and development of its language and culture over the centuries, it also showed how it was managing to hold its own despite war and an embargo (see C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, Summer 1995, pp. 9 and 10). At present the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns is being planned for spring 1997 in Budapest.

This past year Rusyns have been recognized as a distinct people in Europe and in the United States with their own entries in a number of reference works. Among these are the Encyclopedia of World Culture, Vol. VI: Russia and Eurasia/China (Yale University Human Relations Area Files, 1994); An Ethnographical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires (1994); the Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America, Vol. I (1995); and the Encyclopedia of New York City (Yale University Press, 1995). An encyclopedia published in Slovakia in English by the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1994, entitled Slovakia and the Slovaks, includes a separate entry on Rusyns and even on the Rusyn Renaissance Society. Finally, the Encyklopediá l’adovej kultúry Slovenska (Encyclopedia of Folk Culture in Slovakia), published in 1995 by the Slovak Academy of Sciences and prepared under the auspices of the Academy’s Institute of Ethnology, also offers a separate entry for Rusyns. Both of these publications recognize Rusyns as a distinct national minority within Slovakia. The Slovak scholarly community is to be commended not only for its erudition, but also for its ethnocultural sensitivity.

In addition to these publications, a popular brochure on Rusyns was published this past year by the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center in separate English, Slovak, and Ukrainian editions, and by European homeland organizations in a bilingual Serbian and Vojvodinian Rusyn edition. A Hungarian edition is in press, and a Polish edition is presently in preparation. A German edition is also planned.

Finally, in the introduction to a forthcoming book, A New Slavic Language is Born, the distinguished professor of linguistics and member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Nikita Tolstoj, argues that evidence presented at a scholarly conference connected with the January 1995 Rusyn-language codification ceremony in Bratislava “convincingly reveals that the idea for such a literary language is not a fantasy or the imaginary creation of a few isolated individuals or groups.” Professor George Grabowicz of the Harvard University Ukrainian Institute acknowledges in an article in the current Slavic Review (Fall 1995, pp. 678) that “if a given group, say the Carpatho-Rusyns, considers itself separate... then, ethically and anthropologically speaking, it is separate.” Even The Ukrainian Weekly recently discussed the relationship between Rusyns and Ukrainians specifically in Eastern Slovakia in an article entitled, “Rusyn or Ukrainians? Rusyn Minority Pushes for Separate Identity” (November 26, 1995). Is it not reassuring to see the world catching up to the reality of our existence?
Since the Revolution of 1989 and the fall of Communist regimes in east-central Europe, a new Rusyn national revival has been underway. The present movement places great emphasis on codifying and promoting the Rusyn language as an essential component of national self-identity. The importance of language was also emphasized by Rusyn cultural activists during the interwar years, one of whom was the Greek Catholic priest, Emylijan Boksaj.

Emylijan Boksaj was born in 1889 in Kobylec’ka Poljana, a small village in the far eastern corner of Subcarpathian Rus’ (former Maramaros county of the Hungarian Kingdom) where his father Josyf was serving as the priest in the local Greek Catholic parish. A couple of years later, the family—which by then included a younger brother Josyf Boksaj, the future renowned Subcarpathian painter—moved to the village of Lochovo near Mukacevo, where their priest-father had been transferred. The two boys received their elementary education in Lochovo and then were sent to the gymnasium (secondary school) in Mukacevo. Upon graduation in 1907, Emylijan was sent to the Theological Seminary in Budapest which he successfully completed four years later.

It was not until the end of 1914, after World War I had already begun, that Boksaj was consecrated to the priesthood. He served the Greek Catholic parish in Mukacevo until 1917, when he was transferred to Uzhhorod. For the next three decades, his career as priest, teacher, writer, and editor was connected with that city.

Within a year or so after arriving in Uzhhorod, Austria-Hungary ceased to exist and the city, together with all Rusyn-inhabited lands south of the Carpathians, was united with the new state of Czechoslovakia. Uzhhorod was not only the seat of the Greek Catholic eparchy of Mukacevo, it also became the administrative center of the autonomous Czechoslovak province of Subcarpathian Rus’. Boksaj adapted quickly to the new political conditions which under Czechoslovak rule favored promotion of the Slavic culture of the Rusyns. He was appointed professor of religion at the Uzhhorod gymnasium, and from that post helped to educate between 1918 and 1944 two generations of Carpatho-Rusyn youth. Boksaj had a profound love of his native land, taught in the Rusyn vernacular, and published all his school and religious textbooks in Rusyn, including Nauka o vtri (1924), Lyturgyka (1935), and Chrystijanska katolyčeska etyka (1938). He was also one of the co-authors of a Hungarian-Rusyn dictionary (Madjars ko-rus’kyjslovar’, 1928).

The interwar years were characterized by a struggle between various factions of the local Subcarpathian intelligentsia. Some argued that Rusyns were a distinct Slavic nationality, others that they were simply a branch of either the Russian or Ukrainian nationalities. Boksaj made his position on this matter clear in the newspaper, Nedilja, of which he was founding editor-in-chief from 1935 to 1938. “We highly regard,” wrote Boksaj in the very first issue, “the cultural strength of both the Great Russian and Ukrainian peoples. ... Nevertheless, we do not want to forget our own culture. We also have a history, our own traditions, our own specific problems and goals, and our own cultural and political needs; and it is these which must be for us of primary concern.” All issues of Nedilja, from first to last, were published in the Rusyn vernacular.

World War II brought new political changes which profoundly affected Father Boksaj’s Rusyn homeland. Under the new Soviet regime that came to power in 1945, the Greek Catholic Church was about to be forcibly dissolved. That same year, Boksaj was transferred to the Eparchy of Prešov, which remained within the boundaries of postwar Czechoslovakia. For the next five years, he served in various Rusyn parishes in eastern Slovakia until 1950, when the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated there as well. Boksaj then moved to Košice where he was to remain for the rest of his life.

During those last years, the aged priest remained true to his lifelong goals to bring to his people the word of God and to explain to them the practices of their church in a medium that they could best understand, their native Rusyn language. It is not surprising, therefore, that among the unpublished writings found after his death was a translation into Rusyn of the four Gospels. It would be a most fitting tribute to the memory of the Rusyn priest-patriot, Father Emylijan Boksaj, if some day his Gospels in Rusyn were to be published.

Philip Michaels
THE SLOVAK GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

The following are two letters of response received from officials of the Slovak government to the INQUIRY regarding national discrimination against Rusyns in Slovakia which was sent to several ministries, newspapers in Bratislava, and to other officials in fall 1995 and was published in the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Fall 1995.—Editor

From the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic:

I was asked by the Minister of Culture, Ivan Hudec, to respond to your letter of inquiry. Please allow me to address your concerns directly.

State funds intended for specific purposes are given by law to the Ministry of Culture to be used for the development of the culture, identity, and mother tongue of national minorities in the Slovak Republic. These funds are distributed by the ministry to projects approved by the special commission for minority culture within the framework of the State program for culture entitled PRO SLOVAKIA.

In connection with this process, officials of the Rusyn Renaissance Society [Rusínska obroda] in 1994 used state funds for activities other than those designated in the agreement between the Ministry of Culture and the Rusyn Renaissance Society, and they must return to the ministry 470,089 crowns.

In 1995, the Ministry of Culture again designated funds for the development of the culture, identity, and mother tongue of citizens of the Slovak Republic, including Rusyns. Because the Rusyn Renaissance Society up to now has not settled its debt from 1994 with the ministry, any further state contributions for Rusyn cultural activities have been held back until that debt is paid. The ministry has designated funds in 1995 for the publishing of two periodicals and some non-periodical literature in the Rusyn language.

Beyond this, be informed that the following concerns—the publishing of textbooks, establishment of a department of Rusyn language and culture at the Pedagogical Faculty of Šafárik University in Prešov, and the establishment of schools for Rusyn children and young people—all come under the purview of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. Radio and television broadcasting in the Rusyn language are the responsibility of the National Parliament of the Slovak Republic.

Dušan Mikolaj
General Director of the Section for Local and Specific Culture of the Slovak Ministry of Education

October 11, 1995

From the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic:

Let me begin by welcoming your interest in the fate of Rusyns in Slovakia.

Just as you state at the beginning of your letter, we also affirm that all governments of the Slovak Republic have upheld a policy of supporting the activity of national minorities, and to guarantee this policy they have spent a substantial amount of money. The present government of Premier Vladimír Mečiar is no exception. It has shown interest in the identity of national minorities, the development of their own cultures, education in their mother tongues, and their right to disseminate and receive their own languages and to form organizations.

I would like to address those concerns of yours which relate to the work of Slovakia’s Ministry of Education:

(1) The government has not forbidden the functioning of the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture. Neither the government nor the department of education established this institute. The Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture was established by the civic organization, Rusyn Renaissance Society, in order to prepare materials for the codification of the Rusyn language in Slovakia. The institute was supported with funds from the Slovak Ministry of Culture.

(2) The voluntary transformation of the Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture into a genuine university department is not possible by any administrative decree of the Ministry of Education. The organization of scholarly, pedagogical, economic, and informational bodies belongs, according to law 172/1990, to the academic organs of institutions of higher learning and to the universities themselves.

The Ministry of Education obviously supports institutions of higher learning that are trying to form new organizations for national minorities and it helps provide favorable conditions for this activity. Proof of this lies, for instance, in the assigning of specific funds for Šafárik University in Prešov in 1994. In spite of this, I must state that the department mentioned by you has not come into being. Only an institution of higher learning or university may decide to establish a new department on the basis of advice provided by scholarly and pedagogical experts.

(3) With regard to education in the Rusyn language, the Ministry of Education supported and subsidized the preparation of textbooks for Rusyn children. At the present time pedagogical documents are being prepared, without which even the preparation of teachers cannot be initiated, let alone the teaching of children in the schools where the highest concentration of Rusyn population is found.

The Slovak Ministry of Education refrains from any activity which might discriminate against Rusyns. The main goal of the ministry is that everything which occurs in the educational system should contribute to the well-being of this or that national minority and should be based on firm scholarly documentation. All of this takes time, patience, and the systematic work of experts.

I believe that in this activity you and the organizations which you represent can contribute significantly with your experience.

I look forward to cooperative work with you,

Marián Tólnay
Director of the Section of Higher Education Slovak Ministry of Education

October 19, 1995
THE RUSYN MUSIC OF BÉLA BARTOK

Folk music has frequently served as a source of inspiration to composers of classical music. This is particularly the case in the pre-World War I multinational Hungarian Kingdom, whose many peoples provided an unending source of melodies for composers. While the nineteenth-century composer Franz Liszt held a low opinion of what he considered peasant music, the renowned twentieth-century composer, Béla Bartok, not only collected and studied folksongs from the many peoples of the Hungarian Kingdom, he also used them in his compositions.

Bartok was born on March 25, 1881, in a small town in southern Hungary, Nagyszentmiklós (Romanian: Sinnicolau Mare), which after 1918 was annexed to Romania. Bartok’s father died in 1889, when the boy was only eight years old, and soon after he moved with his mother to Sevljus (present-day Vynohradiv) in Subcarpathian Rus’. There he lived for three years before moving to Bratislava in 1892. Thus, at an early age Bartok was able to experience first hand Romanian, Rusyn, and Slovak as well as his native Magyar culture.

Of special musical interest to readers of the Carpatho-Rusyn American are three works: “A Ruthenian [Rusyn] Song” (Ruten nota); “Burlesque” (Burlesz), later titled “A Ruthenian Dance” (Orosztanz); and “Rhapsody, No. 2.” Through these compositions Bartok helped conserve Rusyn folksong melodies for concert performance.

The “A Ruthenian Song” was the tenth of Bartok’s forty-four duos for two violins; the “Burlesque” was the sixteenth in the series. Both appeared in Bartok’s Forty-four duos for two Violins completed in 1931. In a letter from Budapest to a friend, dated December 20, 1931, the Hungarian composer complained about the pace of publication for the forty-four duos:

I have also written recently 44 short, easy duets for two violins in which I have incorporated Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, Rusyn, and even Arabic melodies. I would have liked to send you a copy of these too, but my publishers have dragged the business out for so long that they are hardly likely to appear before the summer. Bungling everything, all along the line!

While arranged in order of difficulty, the violin duos were to be played in groups without intervals for concert performance. The “Burlesque” was the third piece in group I (44, 19, 16, 28, 43, 36, 21, 42) and the “A Ruthenian Song” was the fourth piece in group II (17, 38, 37, 10, 35, 39). The remaining pieces were sorted out into three groups.

In 1936, Bartok transcribed six of these duos for piano solo performance in his Petite Suite, published in Austria with a copyright date of 1938 for the Universal Edition. Included in this transcription was the “A Ruthenian Dance” (formerly titled “Burlesque”) as a piano solo. Bartok also apparently incorporated Rusyn peasant folksong music he collected over the years in Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary into a few of his other works.

Béla Bartok. Drawing by Ben Todd, student at The Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington.

In a letter to Octavian Beu in January 1931, the Hungarian composer wrote that he did not intentionally identify the sources of his folk melodies in his “Rhapsody No. 2” for violin and piano. He admitted, however, that in composing it in 1928, he “partially” used “Romanian, Hungarian, and Rusyn” folk melodies for that work. He further contrasted it with his “Rhapsody No. 1,” written earlier in 1928 for violin (with later versions for cello and piano and for violin and orchestra) and “partially” based on Romanian and Hungarian folk melodies—but not Rusyn ones! In 1944, about a year before his death in the United States where he had sought refuge during World War II, Bartok revised his “Rhapsody No. 2” for violin and orchestra. But he kept intact the Romanian, Hungarian, and Rusyn melodies.

While more detailed study of Béla Bartok’s musical conservation of Rusyn folk melodies is needed, three of his works clearly capture the spirit of Rusyn folk music: “A Ruthenian Song” for two violins (1931); “Burlesque” for two violins (1931), later retitled “A Ruthenian Dance” for piano solo (1936); and “Rhapsody No. 2” for violin and piano (1928), subsequently scored for violin and orchestra (1944).

Although himself not a Rusyn, Bartok nevertheless provided for all time the classical repertoire with Rusyn musical themes in at least three compositions. These are available in a complete edition of Bartok’s works recorded in the late 1960s and early 1970s on Hungary’s Hungaroton label. The year 1995 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the composer’s death. Today Rusyns and others may want to listen to these works and to remember this musical genius of the twentieth century in a special way.

Raymond M. Herbenick
Dayton, Ohio
THE CARPATHO-RUSYNS (part 3)

This is the third part of a general introductory article on all aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn life which we began in the Summer 1995 issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American (Vol. XVIII, No. 2). Considering the enormous changes that have taken place in the European homeland during the past few years, we feel it appropriate to provide our readers with new and updated information.—Editor

History

The ancestors of the Carpatho-Rusyns can be traced to Slavic peoples who began to appear in the valleys of the Carpathian Mountains in small numbers during the fifth and sixth centuries. Their presence is related to the question of the original homeland of the Slavs and the invasion into east-central Europe by nomadic peoples from central Asia.

Today most scholars agree that the center of the original homeland for all Slavic peoples was the region just north of the Carpathian Mountains in what is today eastern Poland, southwestern Belarus, and northwestern Ukraine. During the 440s, an Asiatic people known as the Huns crossed through the Slavic homeland and burst into east-central Europe, bringing with them Slavic peoples, some of whom settled in Carpathian Rus'. A century later, one of the tribes living in the original Slavic homeland known as White Croats had begun to settle in the valleys of the northern as well as southern slopes of Carpathian Rus'.

In the course of the sixth and early seventh centuries, the White Croats built fortified towns to protect their own people as well as the surrounding countryside which still included some Slavic settlers who had settled there earlier during the Hunnic invasions. During the seventh century, many of the Slavic tribes began to move out in various directions from their original homeland. Whereas some White Croats remained behind in Carpathian Rus', most moved southward into the Balkan peninsula. Their descendants are the modern Croats.

The first important event in the history of Carpathian Rus' occurred during the second half of the ninth century. In the early 860s, two missionaries from the Byzantine Empire, the brothers Cyril and Methodius, set out to bring the Christian faith to the Moravian Empire, which at the time was centered in what is today the eastern Czech Republic (Moravia) and western Slovakia. To this day, Carpatho-Rusyns believe either: (1) that before their mission to Moravia Cyril and Methodius brought Christianity to Carpathian Rus' and even established a bishopric at the fortified center of Mukachevo, or (2) that this was accomplished during the 880s by the disciples of the Byzantine missionaries. Regardless of who actually did the conversion, it does seem certain that there was some kind of Christian presence in the Carpathians well before the end of the ninth century.

The very end of that same century brought another event that eventually was to have a profound effect on Rusyn historical development. Sometime between 896 and 898, a new Asiatic warrior people, the Magyars (ancestors of the modern-day Hungarians), crossed the crests of the Carpathians and settled in the region known as Pannonia, that is, the flat plain between the middle Danube and lower Tisza Rivers. From their new home, the Magyars eventually built a state called Hungary.

When the Magyars first crossed the Carpathians, they captured the White Croat hill fortress of Hungvar (modern-day Uzhhorod). There they defeated the semi-legendary Prince Laborec, who was later to become one of the first heroes of Rusyn history. Despite their military victory, the Magyars were initially unable to take control of Carpathian Rus', which during the tenth and for most of the eleventh century remained a borderland between the kingdom of Hungary to the south and the Kievan Rus' principality of Galicia to the north. In the absence of any outside political control. Slavs from the north (Galicia) and east (who actually arrived from Podolia via the mountain passes of Transylvania) continued to settle in small numbers in various parts of the Carpathian borderland, which the Hungarians and other medieval writers referred to as the Marchia Rutheniorum—the Rus' March. These new immigrants, from the north and east, like the Slavs already living in Carpathian Rus', had by the eleventh century come to be known as the people of Rus', or Rusyns. The term Rusyn also meant someone who was a Christian of the Eastern (Byzantine) rite.

Rusyn migration from the north and east, in particular from Galicia, continued until the sixteenth century and even later. This was possible because the mountains, especially in western Carpathian Rus' (the Lemko Region), were not very high and were crossable through several passes. The sixteenth century also witnessed another migration into Carpathian Rus', this one by Vlach shepherds from the south. The Vlachs were originally of Romanian origin, although they were quickly assimilated by the Rusyns. The Vlachs moved throughout the entire range of the Carpathians as far west as Moravia. Their name Vlach soon came to mean a profession (shepherd) and legal status (tax-free person) rather than a nationality (Romanian).
The purpose of this somewhat extended discussion of early history is to emphasize the complex origins of the Carpatho-Rusyns. They were not, as is often asserted, exclusively associated with Kievan Rus’, from which it is said their name Rusyn drives. Rather, the ancestors of the present-day Carpatho-Rusyns are descendants of: (1) early Slavic peoples who came to the Danubian Basin with the Huns; (2) the White Croats; (3) the Rusyns of Galicia and Podolia; and (4) the Vlachs of Transylvania. Moreover, because Carpatho-Rusyns received Christianity over a century before Kievan Rus’, it is likely that they used the name Rusyn and were called by others Rusyn (Latin: Rutheni) even before the arrival of subsequent Rusyn migration from the north and east. On the other hand, because their Eastern-rite Christian religion derived from Orthodox Byzantium, Carpatho-Rusyns maintained cultural and religious ties with the Kievan Rus’ principality of Galicia to the north, with Moldavia/Transylvania to the south, and other Orthodox lands (central Ukraine and later Russia) farther east. Carpathian Rus’ was not, however, under the political hegemony of Kievan Rus’ nor for that matter of any other East Slavic political entity until the second half of the twentieth century! Instead, Carpathian Rus’ has historically been within political and cultural spheres that are firmly part of central Europe.

By the second half of the eleventh century, Rusyn lands south of the Carpathians came under the control of the kingdom of Hungary. Hungarian rule remained firmly entrenched until 1526, after which most of the kingdom was conquered by the Ottoman Turks. The small amount of land that still constituted Hungary, including Rusyn-inhabited territory, was divided between the Austrian Habsburg Empire and the semi-independent Hungarian principality of Transylvania. The Ottoman presence lasted until the outset of the eighteenth century, when the Habsburgs finally gained control of all of Hungary, including Transylvania. Consequently, Habsburg Hungary was to rule Rusyn lands south of the Carpathians until 1918.

North of the mountains, the Rusyn-inhabited Lemko Region that had been within the nominal sphere of the medieval Rus’ principality of Galicia was, in the mid-fourteenth century, incorporated into the kingdom of Poland. Polish rule lasted until 1772, when Galicia was annexed by the Habsburg Empire and made into one of the provinces of Austria. Thus, from the late eighteenth century to 1918, all Carpatho-Rusyns found themselves under Habsburg rule, whether in the Hungarian kingdom or in the Austrian province of Galicia.

Although since the early middle ages Carpatho-Rusyns never had any political independence, they were recognized as a distinct group within the multinational Hungarian and Polish kingdoms and later the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In earlier times, when Carpathian Rus’ was sparsely settled, Rusyn and Vlach mountain dwellers were treated for many decades as a privileged group that did not have to pay taxes. By the sixteenth century, however, most Carpatho-Rusyns were reduced to the status of peasant serfs dependent on either Hungarian, Polish, or later Austro-German landlords. Finally, during the last few decades of the Habsburg Empire’s existence, between the 1870s and 1918, there was an attempt, especially in the Hungarian kingdom, to eliminate the Carpatho-Rusyns as a group through a policy of state-supported national assimilation.

Carpatho-Rusyns were able to survive as a distinct people largely because of their association with Orthodox Eastern Christian churches in the otherwise Roman Catholic social and political environment of Hungary, Poland, and later Habsburg Austria-Hungary. Among the most important symbols for Carpatho-Rusyns of their Orthodox eastern-rite identity was the Monastery of St. Nicholas on Monk’s Hill (Černča Hora) near Mukačevo. This religious center, which in the fifteenth century became the residence for bishops, was founded in the 1390s by Prince Fedir Koriatovyc. Koriatovyc was a prince of Podolia invited by the king of Hungary to administer the fortress of Mukačevo and the surrounding lands that included several Rusyn villages. As lord of Mukačevo, he is considered by Carpatho-Rusyns to be among their important national leaders. (To be continued)

Paul Robert Magocsi
Toronto, Ontario
What motivated the Pittsburgh Rusyn community to found the Carpatho-Rusyn Society—CRS?

We were motivated by three factors. The first of these was the inspiration gained by myself and several other Pittsburgh area Rusyns when we attended the Second World Congress of Rusyns in Krynica, Poland, in May 1993. There we experienced firsthand the advances made by our people in Europe. What really impressed us was that in addition to their remarkable cultural achievements, Rusyn activists there were in most cases able to transcend religious divisions. Doing so has enabled their cultural organizations to appeal to and incorporate people from a variety of religious backgrounds. Here in the United States we’ve always had some sort of Rusyn cultural activity, but it has unfortunately been divided along religious lines. Our experience at the world congress inspired us and gave us a model to emulate.

The second factor motivating us to found the CRS was the increasing number of people who approached the University of Pittsburgh Slavic Department asking for help to find out more about their Rusyn heritage and who, in turn, were referred to me or other Rusyn activists. We saw a renewed interest in Carpatho-Rusyn culture, particularly among the younger generations and those whose parents were the original immigrants.

The final matter which convinced us of the need to form a Rusyn cultural organization was that too many Rusyn Americans view Rusyn culture as “something that my grandmother did,” not as something living that can be experienced and expressed now. One of the challenges which we have taken on is to help people to understand that we are not dealing with a dead language or a dead culture that needs to be preserved like a museum piece. We are dealing with a living, breathing, evolving culture.

On the basis of these experiences, we felt that it was time to create a Rusyn organization. The new organization would focus on culture, and would not select membership on the basis of religious persuasion. Probably 40 percent of Rusyns in the western Pennsylvania area are neither Orthodox nor Byzantine Catholic. Some are Roman Catholic or Protestant, and some have no religious affiliation. This religious diversity reflects the American mainstream. Much like other Americans, Rusyns no longer require that their religious affiliation be connected with their ethnic or cultural identity. This is astounding when you recall that the clergy of the traditional churches had expended decades of effort in encouraging Rusyns strongly to associate their Rusyn nationality with a particular church. We felt that there should be some way for all Rusyns, regardless of religious affiliation, to gather together to enjoy and manifest their common Rusyn heritage.

Now that Rusyns have the opportunity to renew themselves in the European homeland, our people here need to understand that culture evolves. Alongside Rusyn culture in the homeland, there is a Rusyn-American culture as well, garnered from our 100 years of residence in this country.

The following interview with John Righetti, president of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, was conducted by Susyn Y. Mihalasky, Associate Editor of the C-RA.—Editor

Who are the members of the CRS and what are their European roots?

Our membership currently breaks down to be about 50 percent Rusyns whose ancestors are from eastern Slovakia, 20 percent from the Lemko Region, and 25 percent from Transcarpathia. The remaining 5 percent are not of Rusyn background.

In terms of age, one might expect an organization like ours to recruit largely from a retired population, but we actually divide evenly between retired and working adult populations. We have a much younger membership base than most other cultural organizations in western Pennsylvania. The only place in western Pennsylvania where one sees the leadership in the 20 to 40-year-old age range is among Rusyns and Poles. The leaders of other East European groups are in their fifties.

What is the religious affiliation of your membership?

We have no statistics about this because we don’t ask! This is a deliberate policy on our part, but it does not arise out of a lack of respect for religion. We understand that Eastern Christianity has traditionally been a significant component of Rusyn culture. We feel, however, that particularly in our context one doesn’t need to be affiliated with a particular religious persuasion in order to be a member of our organization or to celebrate Rusyn culture. In the two years of our organization’s life, we have held only one meeting in a church hall. The rest of the meetings have been held in public libraries, picnic groves, and colleges. In doing this we send a message to our members and the community that everyone is welcome.

How does your membership break down by geographical location?

About 70 percent of the members reside in western Pennsylvania; another 15 percent are in the greater Cleveland and eastern Ohio area. The rest are scattered throughout the United States. We originally founded the CRS to serve the cultural needs of Rusyns living in western Pennsylvania. But when I talked with people as far away as California, they insisted that they had waited a long time for a Rusyn cultural organization in which they could have membership and participate, even from a distance. They are satisfied with being able to receive the CRS newsletter [The New Rusyn Times] which allows them to keep in contact with fellow Rusyns and to learn about their heritage. When we started a year ago, our goal was to achieve 100 members in one year, and in five years to spin off a Cleveland chapter. Well, here we are only two years later with over 400 members, and the Cleveland chapter has already been established.

To serve our distant members, we videotape all of our meetings, and they have access to these tapes at little or no cost. We wish only that our distant members could participate in the benefits of our social interaction face-to-face.

What are some of the challenges you have faced in your first year and how you have tried to deal with them?

In any organization, the two most important concerns are income and volunteers. As for the first, we are by no stretch of the imagination a rich organization, and we are very careful about the way in which we spend money. Many good people have made donations to get us set up and

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running in our first year and to keep us viable. Right now membership dues make up about 85 percent of our income, and 15 percent comes from donations. We are looking down the road to see how we can hold fundraisers and access philanthropic and endowment dollars.

We do get some income in the form of donations from outside the Rusyn community. For instance, we just did a cultural display for a public library that wanted to feature the culture of its East European patrons, who are almost exclusively Rusyn. In return, the library made a donation to the CRS. We also formed a choir to sing Rusyn carols at a Christmas event in downtown Pittsburgh and were compensated for that, too.

The recruitment of volunteers has been a little slower in coming along, although we are really pleased with the overall results. Just recently someone volunteered to head our Genealogy Committee. We also have someone to manage mailing lists for membership and someone else is compiling mailing lists for recruitment. As we continue to grow, more people are stepping forward to volunteer. Some of these volunteers are also geographically spread out. One is in Florida, another is in Washington, D.C., some are in Cleveland, and most others are here in western Pennsylvania.

What has the CRS been doing in connection with cultural activities?

Chief among the CRS’s activities and achievements during its first year was its presentation at a wide variety of venues of an educational display of Rusyn cultural artifacts. The CRS has used this portable display to educate the public about Rusyns at the American Carpatho-Russian Youth (ACRY) National Convention in Pittsburgh, the Byzantine Catholic Day and Carpatho-Russian Day festivals at Kennywood Park, the Uniontown Rusyn Festival, the Penn State University Slavic Festival, St. Tikhon Orthodox Seminary’s Pilgrimage in South Canaan, Pennsylvania, and at the Ligonier Public Library. Along with the Slavijane Folk Ensemble, the CRS is co-sponsor of an annual Carpatho-Rusyn display at the Pittsburgh Folk Festival. We also assisted St. Anne’s Church in Port Richie, Florida, with information for a cultural display on Rusyns at their local public library. We helped the Andy Warhol Museum Foundation develop a Rusyn fund-raiser complete with ethnic Rusyn food and entertainment provided by one of our members, Jerry Jumba, who is an expert in Rusyn folk music, folklore, and Eastern Church chant.

The CRS has most recently been represented at the Luzerne County Folk Festival in Hazleton, Pennsylvania; the Orthodox Society of America National Convention in Westlake, Ohio; and Byzantine Catholic Day in Parma, Ohio.

How has the CRS been received by the local, non-Rusyn, non-Slavic population attending these events?

The professional community, including librarians, museum staff, and others, has received us enthusiastically. At a much greater rate than we had ever imagined, the local community is turning to us as the official source of information on Rusyn culture. I get an astonishing number of phone calls with questions about Rusyn culture from public cultural institutions such as the Warhol Museum, the Pittsburgh Children’s Museum, or the Pittsburgh International Folk Dancers. With regard to other ethnic groups, we have not met with any significant resistance in any way, shape, or form from anyone. I consider it encouraging that the two Slovak radio programs here in western Pennsylvania have been glad to cooperate with us in announcing and advertising our meetings and events.

How has the CRS been greeted by other Slavic groups such as the Ukrainians and Russophile Carpatho-Russians?

The strongest reaction has been from one Russophile Rusyn family-run group which issued a letter to various clergy, encouraging them to visit our meetings in order to protest our destruction of the “identity and integrity of our people by calling them ‘Rusyn!’” But we have had no protesters at our meetings and have heard nothing from this group since then. And among our members and supporters there are many Russophile Rusyns.

One of our members is the president of the Orthodox Society of America (OSA) and is very proud of his Rusyn heritage. He contacted us with an invitation to take our display to the OSA convention in Ohio. We went prepared to encounter Rusyns who would insist that they were Russians—but there was none of that. Out of all the representatives to the convention, only one man said that we are not Rusyns. And then he proceeded to trace his roots back not to Russia, but specifically to the Carpatho-Rusyn village of Slovinky in Spiš county. The convention participants were really quite enthusiastic, including some who are leaders in the Russophile Rusyn community. In fact, one of them, a clergyman in the Orthodox Church, wrote later praising us for doing important cultural work and asking to become a member of the CRS.

In connection with this, I recall the wisdom of an Orthodox bishop who once told me that the reason many Rusyns in western Pennsylvania think they are Russian is because they’ve never really met a Russian. If they had actually met and spoken with a Russian, they would know that they themselves are not Russian.

Interestingly, with more travel being done to the Rusyn homeland and more investigation into ethnic roots on the part of the younger generations, people are beginning to discover—and be proud of—their true heritage.

Finally, there has been no response to the CSR, either positive or negative, from the Ukrainian community.

How have the local churches and clergy welcomed the CRS?

Official church representatives have welcomed the concept. Generally, however, they feel that the church’s job is not to foster ethnic identity but to provide spiritual guidance. I should add that our newsletter always has church-oriented material because we see church life as an integral part of our culture. Nevertheless, we don’t get into the business of whether the Greek Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church is the “true owner” of Rusyn identity. Simply put, Eastern Christianity is a part of our Rusyn culture, but one does not have to be an active participant in Eastern Christian spiritual life in order to be involved with Rusyn culture.

Only a small number of local clergy has actually been supportive. We are not disappointed about this because, in all honesty, we never expected much support. We know that many Rusyn parishes have been “denationalized” over the
years. If a priest informs his parish that we will be having a meeting in the area, that’s great, but we don’t nurture a dependence on this kind of support. We disseminate our message mostly through our own membership and the secular press. The Rusyn ethnic and religious press has also been very accepting of us. The Church Messenger [American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church], the Byzantine Catholic World [Pittsburgh], and Horizons [Parma, Ohio] have all carried information on the startup of the CRS, along with information on our meetings. The Greek Catholic Union has carried information about us as well.

What role have Lemko Rusyns played in the CRS?

Our study of local parishes suggests to us that Lemkos make up about 40 percent of all Rusyns here in the western Pennsylvania area. One of the things that has always intrigued me is that, unlike the situation in New York, New Jersey, and Cleveland, where Lemkos have a strong group awareness, the vast majority of Lemkos in western Pennsylvania do not. By way of illustration, the term “Lemko,” widely recognized and used in New York and New Jersey, is not well known or widely used here. As a result, it has been more difficult contacting the Lemko community here. Nevertheless, we are making progress.

What efforts have been undertaken by the CRS to network with other Rusyn communities outside Pennsylvania and the United States?

We have an interest in expanding our relations with Rusyns in Poland, Ukraine, and Hungary. As regards Rusyns in Slovakia, the CRS has raised over $1000 to support the publication of the Rusyn Renaissance Society’s newspaper Narodný nový, and we sell that society’s music recordings and publications here in the United States. We also maintain contact with our sister Rusyn organizations in the United States: the Lemko Sojuz (Lemko Association of the United States and Canada), the Rusin Association (Minnesota), the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center (Vermont), and the Carpatho-Russian American Center (New York).

What are your members’ views of the codification of Prášov-Region Rusyn as a standard literary language and of the canonizations by the Orthodox Church of the Rusyn priests, the Reverends Alexis Toth (May 1994, in South Canaan, Pennsylvania) and Maksym Sandovyc (September 1994, in Gorlice, Poland)?

All of us feel that the codification of Rusyn puts an end to the last issue that others can use against us to deny our existence as a distinct nationality—that Rusyns are not a distinct nationality because they do not have their own language.

The canonization events have been very interesting because they have resurrected the issue of ethnicity, particularly within the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). The heaviest russification efforts took place in the OCA at the turn of the century, when ethnic Rusyn parishes first passed from Greek Catholicism into Orthodoxy.

Three or four generations of people (in the OCA) have wrestled with the questions: “Who am I? Something Russian? ‘Little’ Russian? ‘Soft’ Russian? Or ‘Russian-but-not-like-the-Muscovites’?” When the second and third generations of Rusyns in the OCA hear the word “Russian,” they just naturally assume that the balalaika, samovar, and sarafan are elements of their own culture.

I applaud the OCA, however, for the way in which they have responded to the Rusyn ethnic identity question raised by the canonizations. They have transcended a Russian elitism to say: “We are the Orthodox Church in America. As such, Rusyns may be Rusyns within our Church. Not only do they have the right to their Rusyn identity, but we have to acknowledge the fact that they were and are a significant portion of our Church.”

What activities and new directions is the CRS pursuing and considering for the future?

Among our larger current projects is to help restore the Rusyn ethnic garden as a part of the city of Cleveland’s Cultural Gardens Renovation Project. The garden, including a bust of the Rusyn national awakener, Aleksander Duchnovyc, was established in the 1930s by the Rusin Elite Society (see the C-RA, Vol. VI, No. 1, Spring 1983, pp. 4-5).

We are also in discussion with the Andy Warhol Museum here in Pittsburgh concerning the possibility of bringing from Europe a Rusyn artist to Pittsburgh to lecture on contemporary Rusyn art forms and to display his or her works at the museum. It would bring out the arts community and also let people see that Rusyn culture is a living, breathing phenomenon and not something that stopped dead 100 years ago.

In addition, we are working with the Carpatho-Russian Research Center on a massive Western Pennsylvania Historical Society project. We are helping them to put together an entire room to illustrate how Rusyns lived at the turn of the century.

We are involved as well with the Duquesne University Tamburitzans, who perform East European folk material, yet very rarely Rusyn material. Unfortunately, the Rusyn material they did perform was usually called “Ukrainian” or “Slovak.” We have now established a relationship with them to help them to add authentic Rusyn material to their repertoire. We are currently purchasing Rusyn song books and tapes for them so that they can begin to familiarize themselves with Rusyn culture from Slovakia. As we find similar folk music from Rusyns in Poland and Ukraine, we will purchase these as a donation to the Tamburitzans. By the way, at the conclusion of our meeting with the Tamburitzans, their executive director decided to have them join the CRS as one of our first association members.

One of our future goals is to establish further contacts with Rusyn groups in Europe, and for both of us to understand that we together are viable manifestations of the same culture. In connection with this, the CRS is planning a “Rusyn Heritage Tour” of the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland in Europe that will focus just on things Rusyn. CRS guides will provide informed commentary as the tour travels to important sites in Rusyn history and culture. It will be the first tour of its kind. Rusyn Americans who want to visit the Old Country with the benefit of guides and translators normally have had to go on tours geared toward other—Polish, Slovak, Ukrainian—groups and interests. The Rusyn Heritage Tour is tentatively planned for June-July, 1996.

For further information, please call John Righetti in Mars, Pennsylvania at (412) 625-9149.
RECENT EVENTS

Prešov, Slovakia. On September 28, 1995, the professional Aleksander Duchnovyč Theater in Prešov began its 50th anniversary season. Founded after World War II as the Ukrainian National Theater, it first performed plays in Russian (1945-1951), then in Ukrainian (1952-1990), and finally since 1991 in Rusyn. For the longest time the language and cultural orientation of the theater was determined by the ideological needs of Czechoslovakia's Communist regime, which during four decades had favored a Ukrainian national orientation for the local Carpatho-Rusyn population.

Since 1990, under the direction of Jaroslav Sisak and the dramatist, Vasył Turok, the theater was renamed for the great nineteenth-century national awakener, Aleksander Duchnovyč, and its plays were henceforth performed primarily in Rusyn. Whether original works or in translation from the classic repertoire.

Local Ukrainian activists are particularly critical of the views of the theater's artistic director, O. Tkac. According to Tkac, "In this season's repertoire we do not have a single play in Ukrainian. The reason is simple: there is no interest in Ukrainian plays in the Rusyn villages of our region." The artistic director reported that during the last two seasons we produced a Ukrainian play each year (by Ol'ha Kobyljans'ka and Ivan Franko) at a cost of about half a million crowns. "We were not, however, able to attract any more ticket sales beyond the poorly attended premieres. How can you expect the state to underwrite the costs of putting on [Ukrainian] plays if no one will buy any tickets?" (cited in Nove žytia, November 11, 1995, pp. 1-2). In contrast, plays performed in Rusyn are more often than not sold out at performances whether in Rusyn villages, in Prešov, or when the Duchnovyč Theater goes on tour, in particular to Bratislava and Prague.

Mukačevo, Ukraine. On November 19, 1995, the Mukačevo branch of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns together with the local city council organized the First Festival of Rusyn Culture in Subcarpathian Rus'. The new festival is called Červena Ruža (Red Rose) and is the first major cultural event sponsored by the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine. Included in the program were professional and amateur folk ensembles from five districts in Transcarpathia, chores from the Mukačevo Greek Catholic parish and the city's Musical Academy, a group of dancers from the Transcarpathian Folk Ensemble under Klara Balog, soloists from the Užhorod Philharmonic Orchestra, and a delegation with performers from the Ruska Matka Society in the Vojvodina Region of Yugoslavia (Serbia). The chairperson of the Mukačevo branch of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, Karel Rusyn, hopes that the new festival will become an annual event with participation by ensembles from all countries where Rusyns live.

OUR FRONT COVER

Seventeenth-century woodcut of the Mukačevo castle.

SINCE THE REVOLUTION

Prešov, Slovakia. In September 1995, issue number 9 of Blahovistnyk, the monthly journal of the Greek Catholic Basilian Order in Slovakia, appeared under a new editor, Father Jozefat V. Timkovyč, OSBM. In his introductory editorial, Father Timkovyč traced the history of the monthly which, when it first appeared between 1946 and 1949, was published in Rusyn. From 1969 to August 1995, however, it was published in Ukrainian. Recognizing that a significant number of people in Slovakia can and do identify themselves as Rusyns, the editor stated that "Blahovistnyk will address from now on not only Ukrainians, but Rusyns as well." This means Rusyns who still know their native language and those who read only Slovak.

In its new format, issues 9 through 12 of Blahovistnyk include articles in three languages: Slovak, Rusyn (in the Latin alphabet), and a few pages in Ukrainian. In issue 11, one reader from Humenné wrote: "Publish Blahovistnyk in our Rusyn language, otherwise do not send it to us anymore"; while another 27-year-old reader from Bardejov commented: "If we want to attract young people ... we're more likely to succeed if the texts are written in a language they understand and not in Ukrainian."

Those interested in subscribing may write to: Redakcia Blahovistnika, Manastier sv. Bazila Vel'keho, Vajanskeho 31, 08001 Prešov, Slovakia.

RUSYNS IN CYBERSPACE

The spring 1996 issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American will feature an article about the Carpatho-Rusyn Knowledge Base, which was launched on the Internet's World Wide Web in May 1995.

A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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