CARPATHO-RUSYN
AMERICAN
A Newsletter on Carpatho-Rusyn Ethnic Heritage

Summer, 1978
You can’t miss it if you are flying into New York City over the south of Manhattan, or if you are driving along the New Jersey coast southwest of New York City; or, better yet, if you ever take a ride on the Staten Island Ferry which transports commuters across New York Harbor from the southern tip of Manhattan to Staten Island and back. It is not the Statue of Liberty that I have in mind, although the Statue can be seen from all these perspectives. It is Ellis Island, the Island of Tears.

Located south of Manhattan in Upper New York Bay, only a half mile from the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island is a small piece of land with a long history. First known as Gull Island to the Indians, and then as Oyster Island to the Dutch, it was acquired by a Samuel Ellis, presumably a New Jersey farmer, after whose death in 1794 it was taken over by New York State and named Bucking Island. In 1861, it was renamed Ellis Island, after Samuel, and has remained so ever since.

In 1890, Ellis Island was designated an immigration station, and subsequently served as a deportation station, a Coast Guard station, and a detention center for enemy aliens during and after World War II. By 1954, the island no longer functioned in any of these capacities and was abandoned, the buildings condemned, a chapter of history brought to a close.

Figures differ somewhat, but in approximate terms it is said that over 16 million Eastern and Southern European immigrants passed through its clearance process during the peak years of the new immigration, roughly from the 1890’s to the early 1930’s. Among them were thousands of Carpatho-Rusyns, our parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. They would arrive on ships exhausted and hungry after several days journey in steerage, the section of the ship offering inferior accommodations at the lowest rates. After disembarking at a New York City pier on the Hudson River, they were herded immediately onto ferries and transferred to Ellis Island. Here, they underwent physical examinations, were questioned thoroughly, and with few exceptions, were allowed to enter the United States, scattering out in all directions, seeking friends, relatives, and work.

After it ceased to operate in 1954, Ellis Island was offered for sale, but all the bidders were ultimately rejected. For the next several years, it lay a remote, neglected testimony to the greatest mass movement in human history. It was wildly overgrown with trees and brush, much as its tumultuous immigration experience was crowded out by subsequent events—World War II, Hiroshima, the advent of the Space Age. The buildings were covered with creeping vines, their windows were shattered by vandals, their walls and ceilings crumbled helplessly in the rugged harbor weather. The ominous hush was occasionally broken by the footsteps of a guard and the panting of his police dog, the flapping of wings of pigeons who found a cozy roost in the rafters.

In 1963 and 1964, the National Park Service proposed that the island be designated a national monument, and on May 11, 1965, President Johnson signed a proclamation declaring Ellis Island to be part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. By 1976, the buildings had been restored enough to admit visitors safely while permitting them to view the rooms, halls, and corridors in a “stabilized” condition, that is, not transformed by modern improvements.

Before the island was opened to visitors in 1976, I used to watch for it in great anticipation whenever I took a ride on the Staten Island Ferry. The main building, a rambling red-orange Oriental-looking structure with white trim and four magnificent cupolas, stood rising from amidst the greenery like a brilliant party cake decked in white icing. The ferry moved slowly past the Statue of Liberty, and Ellis Island drifted by in the distance. My grandparents, I would think to myself, passed this way. This is what they saw. What were they thinking of and feeling, besides fatigue and hunger?

I finally visited Ellis Island with my brother this year. A ferry departs from Manhattan and delivers to the island its passengers—often, as in our case, children and grandchildren of immigrants returning to see this most decisive point in the immigrants’ journey. We are lead in a small group through the main building along the general path trod by the immigrants from the large registry hall to the booths at the end where train tickets to all destinations could be obtained. John and I frequently trail behind the group, savoring the silence, straining to hear the last echoes of immigrant voices, footsteps, sighs, tears. There are tears of sorrow—some immigrants must return to their original countries for one reason or another, and tears of joy—most will go on to start a new life begun in the warm embrace of friends and relatives. Tears, tears, the Island of Tears.

We stare out windows of the invisible crowds milling about. Somewhere in that crowd are our grandparents, the young Anna and Manja, and our young grandfathers, Mychajlo and Matej. Could they ever have imagined, standing out there, that their grandchildren would be watching them now from inside? There they walk, with their bundles of belongings. They look up at the windows, but they don’t see us. Their eyes are searching for something else now. They haven’t even found each other yet! So much lies ahead...

John and I exchange glances. We have learned something just now: The immigrants still live; they live within us. We hurry to catch up with the rest of the group. The remarkable sensation still does not leave us. We are the immigrants, and this is our Ellis Island, too. The ferry will leave now for Manhattan, and life will take us on and on. As we move away from Ellis Island, the late afternoon sun dances its fire on the windows of the building. John and I blink back our tears. The Island of Tears has exacted its small tribute from us, too.
Adol'f Dobrianskij was the most important Carpatho-Rusyn political leader in the nineteenth century. He was born in the Rusyn village of Rudlov (Zemplín county) in the Prešov Region of what is today eastern Slovakia. Trained as a civil engineer, he worked in the mining industry in Banská Štiavnica (central Slovakia) until 1848.

Dobrianskij's political activity is distinguished by two distinct phases. Like many other contemporary Slavic leaders, he began as a supporter of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy. When this policy proved unsuccessful, he set his sights on tsarist Russia, which he believed could provide the only salvation for his people.

Dobrianskij's Austrian phase is related to the revolutionary events which rocked Europe in 1848-1849. All the national minorities in the Habsburg Empire put forth demands for political and cultural autonomy, and Dobrianskij became the spokesman for the Carpatho-Rusyns. He met several times with the highest governmental officials in Vienna, and in April 1849 was appointed liaison to the Russian Army which Emperor Franz Joseph had invited to help the Austrians in their armed struggle against the Hungarian revolutionaries. Dobrianskij also managed to gain a few concessions for his own people, including some amount of administrative and cultural autonomy for the "Rusyn" Uzhorod District, which functioned from November 1848 to March 1849. Dobrianskij was not successful, however, in achieving his other goal: unification of Carpatho-Rusyns in Galicia, Bukovina, and Subcarpathian Rus' into one political and administrative unit.

After the demise of the "Rusyn" District, Dobrianskij tried to push his idea for Rusyn autonomy in the Hungarian parliament to which he was elected in 1861 and again in 1865. But Hungarian leaders were very suspicious of this "Pan-Slav agitator" who had helped the Austrian and Russian armies crush their own revolution in 1849. Dobrianskij's project for dividing Hungary into five national districts came to nought.

He was somewhat more successful in the cultural realm. After the death of Alexander Duchnovyc in 1865, Dobrianskij headed the first official Carpatho-Rusyn cultural society, the Society of St. Basil the Great, founded in Uzhorod in 1866. It was also during these years that Dobrianskij, in cooperation with other Rusyn leaders, succeeded in having Russian (or attempts to write in Russian) used as the literary language for Carpatho-Rusyn publications. Because of his increasingly pro-Russian cultural and political stance, Dobrianskij's days in his homeland were numbered. In 1871, he was forced to emigrate to L'viv in neighboring Austrian Galicia, then in 1875 he went to live in Russia's capital, St. Petersburg, where he was greeted by tsarist officials as a friend and political ally. When he finally returned to Austria and settled in Galicia in 1881, he was promptly put on trial for treason. Although he was acquitted, Dobrianskij was forced to live in the farthest western part of Austria, in Innsbruck, until his death in 1904. Only then could he return home to be buried in the family estate in the Prešov Region village of Čertižné (Zemplín county).

Dobrianskij's political orientations caused him great personal difficulties. Because of his early support of the Austrians, he alienated the Hungarians who ruled Subcarpathian Rus'. Later, his pro-Russian stance not only complicated cultural developments in the homeland, but it also forced him to spend the last decades of his life in exile, far from the Carpathian Mountains he loved. Nonetheless, in 1848-1849 he did gain political recognition for the Carpatho-Rusyn people who still remember the achievements of their countryman and their first brief experiment in political and cultural autonomy.
THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE CARPATHO-RUSYNS

(Part 1)

Although we have lived for the past several years in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I am originally from New Jersey, and I remember one time when, on the way to visit my parents, we stopped in a small town near Bridgeport, Connecticut. We were with some colleagues from Harvard, and I have forgotten whether we were speaking Rusyn, Czech, Slovak or Ukrainian—probably each of us a different one—but, in any case, when the waitress came up to the table she asked what language she had overheard. Having convinced her that we were speaking different Slavic languages, she then told us that she knew some “Russian.” “Where did you learn it, in college?” I asked. “Oh no,” she replied, “at home. My grandparents are from Europe and speak Russian.” “From what part of Russia did they come?” “Oh, I don’t know, but it was somewhere in Hungary!!”

Well, where is this place in Hungary that the girl’s grandparents came from? Is it because the place is so remote that third and fourth generation descendents of Subcarpathian immigrants in this country don’t really know about the heritage of the parents, let alone be able to explain it to others?

I would answer no, this is not the reason, because Subcarpathian Rus’—sometimes called Carpatho-Russia, or Carpatho-Ukraine—is not an unknown entity. Certainly not any more “unknown” to the general public than other European lands like Cornwall, Friesland, Friulia, Lusatia, Macedonia, or Slovenia. Probably not many of you have ever heard of nor could easily locate these regions on a map.

There are two points worth remembering. One is that many descendents of national groups similar to those just mentioned (and even some much larger ones) are like descendents of Carpatho-Rusyns to the degree that they are not always clear, nor in many cases do they even care about the heritage of their forefathers. Secondly, Subcarpathian Rus’ is not now, nor has it ever been “unknown,” despite what some foreigners and even some Rusyns in this country and in Europe might think.

Already in the nineteenth century, influential writers like the Russians Michail Pogodin and Nikolaj Nadeždin, Ukrainians like Ilarion Sreznev’skyj, Ivan Franko, and Mychajlo Dragomaniv, and Czechs and Slovaks like Josef Dobrovsky, Jan Kollár, L’udovit Stur, Pavel Šafárik, and Milan Hodža had written about Subcarpathian Rus’. The most widely-read Magyar writer of the period, Mor Jokai, based one of his very popular novels on the castle of Chust. By the twentieth century, the region was visited by the internationally-known Czech writer Karel Čapek, the American writer Erskine Caldwell, and the photographer Margaret Bourke White, and it provided subject matter for the work of all three. To
these leading lights of the European and American intelle-
tigentsias were added a host of other scholars, journalists,
and publicists who produced volumes of writings on the
region, so that by 1931 the distinguished Slavic literary
scholar and linguist Roman Jakobson could state: "In the
whole East Slavic world, there is hardly any other marginal
area whose past has been examined with such affectionate
meticulousness and scholarliness as Carpatho-Rus'."

To reiterate, Subcarpathian Rus' is not now, nor has it ever
been a terra incognita—an unknown land; nor are the
historical and sociological experiences of Carpatho-Rusyns
in Europe and of their descendents in America unique or
substantially different than those of other peoples from other
territories.

Before we proceed further, a word about nomenclature is
necessary. Rus' is a name whose origin can be found in the
loosely-knit political entity of Kievan Rus', sometimes referred
to incorrectly as Kievan Russia, which existed from the late
ninith to early thirteenth centuries and centered on the
territory of present-day Ukraine. Kievan Rus' was under the
influence of Byzantium, the eastern capital of the Roman
Empire, from which Kiev adopted Christianity. During the
following centuries, Orthodox Christianity served as a kind
of cultural mortar for all the eastern Slavic peoples. In the
medieval period, the inhabitants of this cultural sphere
(including Subcarpathian Rus') were collectively known as
Rusyns, or the people of Rus', terms which in addition
meant persons who were affiliated with the Eastern Christian
Church.

As centuries passed and the political situation caused the
East Slavic peoples to develop in different ways, they
received new names. The inhabitants of northern Rus' had
by the seventeenth century come to be known as Russians
or Great Russians, in distinction from people from southern
Rus', known as Little Russians, and by the late nineteenth
century as Ukrainians. By the twentieth century, the names
Rus' and Rusyn were maintained only in the Carpathian
region, especially in Subcarpathian Rus'.

In a sense, these are the last people who have throughout
the centuries maintained the name Rus' handed down from
Kievan times, and it is within this long-term historical context
that it seems appropriate to use the name here. Most
national writers have also preferred the names Rus' and
Rusyn. The adjective Subcarpathian is less complex.
Carpathian indicates the mountains that are the dominant
feature of the area, while the prefix "sub" suggests that the
people in question live south of the crest of the mountains.
This helps to distinguish them from those on the other side
with whom they have much in common. (To be continued)

Paul R. Magocsi

Draft Start

PETE LATZO—A RUSYN BOXING CHAMPION

Boxing fans familiar with the identities of past champions
and contenders often observe that the ethnic composition of
active boxers changed through the late nineteenth and the
twentieth centuries. Irish-American fighters were heavily
represented before World War I, and boxers of Italian and
Jewish backgrounds abounded in the 1920's, 1930's, and
1940's. At the present time, most leading American boxers
in the heavier weight classes are black, and Hispanic boxers
dominate the lighter divisions.

The process in which an ethnic group dominates an
occupation only to be displaced by another (typically more
impoverished) group is termed by sociologists ethnic
succession. Boxing well illustrates this process because
poor youths have used the prize ring to escape the ghetto or
slum. When an ethnic group as a whole becomes more
affluent, the percentage of its members in boxing declines.
While not as numerous as Jewish and Italian fighters, some
men of Slavic background, whose parents immigrated at
about the same time as the first two groups, also became
champions. Thus, Gus Lesnevich (Russian), Tony (Zaleski)
Zale (Polish), and Fritzie Zivic (Croatian) also exemplify this
process.

Carpatho-Rusyns have also produced a champion, Pete
Latzo. Reigning as World Welterweight Champion in 1926
and 1927, he gave Slavic miners of Pennsylvania's
anthracite region a hero whose accomplishments provided
them with a vicarious identification and a release from the
economic deprivation, physical dangers, tedium, and ten­sions of their work. Pete was truly one of their own. Born in
Colerain, he spent most of his youth in the Scranton area. He
worked for a time in the mines in Taylor as a breaker boy, a
dangerous job which involved sorting impurities out of the
anthracite.

By the time he was seventeen, his brother Steve had
become a welterweight contender, and Pete wanted to
compete in the same weight division. However, a promoter
felt it would be to Pete's advantage to establish an identity
distinct from his brother, and prevailed upon him to change
his name. Significantly, he chose an Irish name, "Young
Clancy," following the then fairly common practice for
aspiring boxers of other ethnic backgrounds to assume Irish
names and to thus borrow prestige from a group that had
already produced many brawling, ferocious fighters. Per­haps
either because he had established an independent
reputation or out of pride in his Slavic heritage, Latzo reassumed his own name after about nine fights. In fact, prior to Pete’s championship bout with Joe (Samuel Lazzaro) Dundee in 1927, John Kieran of The New York Times noted the practice of boxers pirating names and wrote, “One thing in favor of Pete Latzo is that he fights under his own name.”

Latzo was undefeated from 1919 until December, 1922, although many of his matches were of the “no decision” variety common at the time. From 1922 until he won the championship from Mickey Walker on May 20, 1926, Pete had fought twenty-four times in Scranton, six times in Wilkes-Barre, and once in Hazelton, and had also travelled to the east and west coasts, losing only six of fifty-four contests. He was known as a good “club fighter,” but was not generally considered of championship caliber. For the title fight with Walker in Scranton he was the decided underdog in the gambling odds.

Since a strike had occurred at that time in the anthracite fields, leaving many families destitute, Latzo’s followers could not afford to wager much money on his victory. But they gave their emotional and vocal support, turning the town’s atmosphere into that of a carnival. Jack Lawrence wrote in the New York Herald Tribune: “This town... is literally fight mad. From the priests of the church to the miners of the adjacent diggings, there is an intense and abiding interest in tomorrow night’s proceedings in the armory. The priests and their flocks have even gone so far as to offer up fervent prayers for a Latzo victory. If Pete should emerge from the ring tomorrow night with the world’s welterweight crown perched on his brow, it is quite certain no coal will be mined here for several days.”

Pete won a ten-round majority decision before 12,000 enthusiastic, screaming partisans in Scranton’s armory. While the referee called the bout a draw, the two judges favored Latzo, and the overwhelming consensus of out-of-town journalists was that the local lad had clearly beaten the Elizabeth, New Jersey, fighter due to his sweep of the last five rounds.

A near riot occurred that night. State and local police were called, and all Scranton celebrated. The miners who risked their cash to bet on Latzo “cleaned up.” His win was, in a sense, a physical and moral victory for the Slavic miners generally. Trying to capture the spirit of the night’s celebration, the renowned Grantland Rice of the New York Herald Tribune wrote: “Pete Latzo of Scranton is the new welterweight champion of the world. As this announcement is being made in Scranton’s great armory just short of midnight there is a riot of noise no single enclosure ever knew before. Twelve thousand fans shrieking and roaring and raving all over the building, including the ring, are in the midst of a jubilee... The dark-haired, serious-faced Slav from Pennsylvania started like a zephyr and finished like a cyclone and hurricane thrown into one.”

Pete Latzo never again equalled his performance against Walker. He successfully defended his title twice, but lost it to Joe Dundee (by means of a fifteen-round decision) on June 3, 1927, at New York’s Polo Grounds. Since he had difficulty making the 147-pound weight limit of the welterweight division, Latzo subsequently fought as a middleweight and light heavyweight. He received two chances at the light heavyweight championship in 1928, losing decisions to Tommy Loughran in Brooklyn and Wilkes-Barre. From then until he retired from the ring in 1934, his career declined, although he fought two men who were later to become world champions, James J. Braddock and Jimmy Slattery. Latzo’s last fight was in Pittsburgh on June 5, 1934, when he lost to a Polish-American boxer, Teddy Yarosz, who himself later became middleweight champion.

Pete Latzo identified closely with the Carpatho-Rusyn community. While he was champion, he fought a non-title match in Pittsburgh, and after defeating Jimmy Jones, told a reporter for Our Monthly Messenger, a publication of the Greek Catholic Union, that he wished to express “appreciation and thanks to the many Rusin visitors I had during my stay” [in the Pittsburgh area]. Pete was a member of the Greek Catholic Union’s Sokol Sojedinenije, and the fraternity’s weekly paper Amerikansky Russky Viesnik referred to him as “our champion.” A group of Rusyns among the crowd of 8000 who attended his bout with Jones even sang “Ja Rusyn byl, jesm i budu” before the fight.

After he retired from the ring, Pete Latzo worked as a welder in Margate, New Jersey. He was sixty-five when he died on July 7, 1968, in Atlantic City.

Professor Richard Renoff
Nassau Community College (SUNY)

**LANGUAGE**

While lacking a standard literary form, Carpatho-Rusyn is rich in dialectal diversity. The following phrases are taken from the dialect spoken in the village of Vyšná Jablonka, located in northeastern Czechoslovakia. As in our first issue, the pronunciation guide represents a close approximation of the authentic sound. Practice these phrases:

- **What is your name?**
  - Jak Vam méno?
  - (Yahk vahm mén-o?)
  - Moje méno je Iván.
  - (Móh-ye mén-o je Ee-vahn.)

- **My name is Ivan.**
  - Jak sja mate?
  - (Yahk syah máh-te?)

- **How are you?**
  - Džakujü, dobri.
  - (Dýah-koo-yoo, dýh-bree.)

- **Fine, thank you.**
  - Tak všyliják.
  - (Tahk vshy-lee-yák.)

- **So, so.**
  - Što novoho?
  - (shtoh nóh-voh-hoh?)

- **What’s new?**
  - (shtoh nóh-voh-hoh?)
COMmUNITY ACTIVITIES

In our first issue we introduced to our readers the enthusiastic work being done by Archimandrite Father Nicholas Smisko of St. Nicholas Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Church in New York City in the preservation of Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic culture and ethnic awareness. Father Nicholas's work is enhanced by an influx of immigrants from the Old Country, people who continually supply the parish with a fresh impression of the living reality of Rusyn culture and ethnic identity. For most of us second and third generation Americans of Carpatho-Rusyn origin the situation is somewhat different.

Most of us have not (or have not yet) seen the rolling green hills, lush forests, and jagged mountains of eastern Slovakia and western Ukraine. For us, the Old Country remains a kind of mystery. While as familiar as grandmother next door, it is still somehow worlds away in time and space. It is something we've always heard about, yet is a place which easily escapes the eyes of one who glances casually at the map of modern Europe. The ethnic identity is within us, perhaps in certain of our values or in the food we like, but it speaks a language which most of us only partly understand—or maybe not at all. If we are to know our ethnic identity, to partake in some way of the richness of our cultural and ethnic origins, we must exert a special effort. This is particularly true in the American context where in previous years we were encouraged to throw off "vestiges" of the old world, vestiges which only now are we beginning to perceive as precious gems of our cultural heritage.

There are among us—the second and third generations—those energetic activists who are taking the lead in what might be called a revival or renewal of interest in ethnic origins. A young man who superbly represents precisely this special effort to preserve and exhibit the wealth of our ethnic culture is Mr. Jerry Jumba of McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. He is the music director of the folk ensemble Slavjane, and along with the group's program director, Mr. Jack Poloka, choreographs the ensemble's many performances.

The Slavjane perform their songs and dances not only as entertainment connected with other events, but in addition, present their own Annual Concert every spring. While performing the songs and dances of many Slavic groups, Slavjane's repertory consists mainly of Carpatho-Rusyn folklore. Perhaps one of the most outstanding features of the ensemble is its striving for authenticity in its expression of folk culture. For our predecessors, authenticity of cultural expression came naturally, of course. For us, authentic reproduction must be the result of intense research, field work, and contacts with authorities in folksong and folk dance. Mr. Jumba, who in a coming issue will relate in more detail his activities and his philosophy of ethnic preservation, himself moves easily in the world of Carpatho-Rusyn folklore. Not only can he handle professionally the arrangement of folk melodies and dance patterns, he is also fluent in the plastic folk arts as well as in folk customs.

For the latest Slavjane Annual Concert which was given on May 21, 1978, Mr. Jumba helped to design the costumes called verchovinci—representative of the Central Uzhhorod Region—and the native embroidery or višňika. Along with miscellaneous folksongs and dances, the ensemble prepared a reproduction of the genuine Rusyn wedding cycle, with its ritual songs, dances, and speeches. Again it was Mr. Jumba who took the major initiative in researching and arranging this performance.

Mr. Jumba does not confine his activities to Slavjane, but instructs other young people in Slavic, and especially Carpatho-Rusyn, folksongs and dances, preparing numerous performances. For instance, ninety-eight young people of grades one through eight of St. Nicholas Byzantine School in McKees Port, Pennsylvania, instructed by Mr. Jumba, presented a successful Carpatho-Rusyn song and dance performance on April 7, 1978. As a result of the enthusiastic reception and general rise in interest in ethnic culture, the school will begin a costume project this fall in order to have the most authentic possible Rusyn costumes for next year's performance.

On May 19, 1978, St. John’s Byzantine Cathedral School presented their Fourth Annual Carpatho-Rusyn Song and Dance Concert, again under the able direction of Mr. Jumba. This time, one hundred fifteen students performed in Rusyn folk dress, accompanied by a folk orchestra.

Mr. Jumba does not work alone, but receives warm, generous support from the schools' authorities, clergy, Sisters, and the parents of the young people involved in the performances. Such cooperation is essential if we are to celebrate our ethnic culture and to share it proudly with others. And such leaders as Mr. Jumba and those who work with him in the renewal of interest in our ethnic origins deserve great praise for their efforts.

If you are also in some way involved in any kind of activity which contributes to the preservation of Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic heritage, and wish to share this with our readers, please inform the editor of this newsletter.

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THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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