FROM THE EDITOR

In the last issue, we discussed what has been done to preserve our Carpatho-Rusyn heritage, what we, as cultural activists in our communities, have done to increase knowledge of our own heritage and retain our ethnic identity in this country. We have come a long way—dance groups, publications, exhibits, and television appearances have all served to increase our visibility among ourselves and among the general public. However, with this increased visibility comes increased responsibility.

The issue of visibility before the general public brings to mind an incident which took place this past year. I was attending a large folk festival in western Pennsylvania and thoroughly enjoying a performance by a Carpatho-Rusyn folk group attired in authentic Carpathian dress. I approached a member of the group and, curious as to what her answer might be, I asked: “Who are the Carpatho-Rusyns?” I was astonished by her answer. “Well, it’s kind of hard to explain. We aren’t Slovak and we aren’t Ukrainian.” Further probing proved to be futile. Here was a member of a fine Rusyn dance group dressed in authentic costume and she was unable to tell me in a few sentences who she was ethnically.

Curiosity piqued, I set out to determine whether this was a rare occurrence or whether it was more widespread. Numerous inquiries later, I was disappointed to discover that there was indeed a problem. The teens in the dance group, the ladies serving food, the people at the exhibit (with the exception of a few individuals) had difficulty articulating any meaningful information about the nature of our ethnic identity.

I should not have been surprised. I had encountered this problem before—at church picnics and other folk festivals. But my disappointment was more acute in this case, due to the high degree of talent and the professional performance of the group participating in this equally well-run folk festival.

When we represent our national heritage at folk festivals, church picnics, and other events, we are obligated to have the minimal knowledge necessary to answer the most basic of questions—Who are the Carpatho-Rusyns? Any Rusyn in authentic costume, serving Rusyn food, participating at an exhibit, or representing Rusyns in any other way must take the time to brief him/herself in order to answer such inquiries.

Although it would be helpful to be able to go into more depth for the more knowledgeable festival-goer, a few short sentences may be sufficient. Something such as, Carpatho-Rusyns are an East Slavic people numbering nearly 1,700,000 in Europe and America. Our people live near the Carpathian Mountains, which today are within the borders of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Rusyns also live in some regions of Yugoslavia and Romania. Frequently, the individual will ask—What is your religion?”; “Aren’t you just like the Russians?”; or similar questions. With some anticipation of possible questions as well as some preparation, we can address these inquiries in an intelligent manner. And then there are always books and other publications we can depend on, such as the recent volume by Dr. Paul R. Magocsi, Our People, which provides easy-to-understand information accompanied by numerous maps and photographs.

The issue seems so obvious, yet many Rusyn-Americans have not been able to provide even basic information to festival-goers and other interested people. Festival-goers should not be expected to understand the difficulties encountered by our people in the past in learning about our heritage. “It is difficult to explain” is not a satisfactory answer to the question, Who are the Carpatho-Rusyns? We owe it to ourselves as proud Carpatho-Rusyns to present ourselves and our rich and beautiful culture in the best possible way—as knowledgeable, articulate people.

AN APPEAL TO OUR READERS

In the winter 1983 issue, we turned to you our readers and asked for your help regarding the column, “Rusyn Forum.” The column is a chronicle of Carpatho-Rusyn activity in many spheres—in society, the community, the church, and in academia, both in Europe and America. A second and equally important purpose is to keep our readership informed of such activities so that they may become more aware of Rusyn activity in the community and also so that they may have the opportunity to participate in events which are of interest to them.

For this column to achieve its dual purpose successfully, we asked our readers to help by sending information about Rusyn events in their parish and in their community. To date, we have received little in this regard.

Our small, geographically dispersed staff cannot by itself acquire information about such activities. It is also difficult for the author of the column, the assistant editor, to keep informed of the many activities taking place in communities across the country.

We suggest that each dance group, parish, or other active Rusyn group ask their publicity director to send information about the group’s activities or even a copy of any article written about the event. If your group does not have a publicity chairperson, perhaps some of our readers would be willing to take it upon themselves to perform this vital service. To do this would provide valuable publicity for your group or function as well as keep our readership informed.

Once again, we ask you to send information about recent, as well as future events, taking place in the Rusyn community. Please tell us what type of event it is, when it occurred or will occur, the location, and the name and telephone number of the person who may be contacted for further information. To publicize a future event, we need the information well in advance of the issue date in which it is to be included. We look forward to your contributions and thank you for your help in this important matter. Send information to: John Righetti, 197 Shiloh Avenue, #404, Pittsburgh, PA 15202.

OUR FRONT COVER

“Mother With Child,” graphic print from the cycle Black and White (1959), by the distinguished contemporary Carpatho-Rusyn artist from the Prešov Region, Orest Dubay.
ALEXANDER DZUBAY (1857-1933)

In this second of four biographies about leading churchmen in Rusyn-American history, we turn to the Reverend Alexander Dzubay, who was to follow in the footsteps of the Reverend Alexis G. Toth, described in the last issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American (Vol. VIII, No. 1).

Like the Reverend Toth, Alexander Dzubay was born into a Greek Catholic priestly family in 1857 in Kal’nyk, a Carpatho-Rusyn village in Bereg county, part of the former Hungarian Kingdom and now the Transcarpathian oblast (Subcarpathian Rus’) of the Ukrainian S.S.R. The young Alexander was educated in various secondary schools (Uzhhorod, Budapest, Sárospatak, and Spišská Nová Ves) before attending the Greek Catholic Seminary in Uzhhorod, which he completed in 1880. A year later, he married and then was ordained to the priesthood. Within less than a year, however, his wife died. The widowed priest then served in several parishes throughout Subcarpathian Rus’ until 1889, when he was sent to America to minister to the Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants in the New World.

Although the Reverend Dzubay was the fourth Greek Catholic priest to arrive in the United States, he was the first to come from the Hungarian Kingdom. Because of this, he later was to consider himself the senior spokesman in America for the Carpatho-Rusyn clergy from south of the mountains. Indeed, Dzubay was a natural-born leader and an effective missionary. First based in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, he helped to organize before World War I numerous other Greek Catholic parishes in the northeast, including Hazleton, Scranton, Johnstown, and Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania; Passaic and Trenton, New Jersey; Brooklyn, New York; and Minneapolis, Minnesota. He also hosted at his Wilkes-Barre parish the first “congress” of American Greek Catholic priests, held in 1890 to protest the recent Vatican decree concerning restrictions placed on Greek Catholic clergy in America, as well as another meeting of lay and religious leaders in 1892, which resulted in the establishment of the Greek Catholic Union (Sojedinenie).

Like most other Greek Catholic priests at the time, Dzubay hoped for the appointment of a bishop for Greek Catholics in America. That hope was finally fulfilled in 1907, with the appointment of Bishop Soter Ortynsky (1866-1916). However, the new bishop’s authority was limited, and many Carpatho-Rusyns were displeased because he was from Galicia and of a Ukrainian national orientation. In order to mitigate such discontent among Carpatho-Rusyns, in 1913 Ortynsky designated Dzubay to be his diocesan vicar-general. The following year Dzubay’s influence among the laity rose even further, when he was elected spiritual director of the influential and by then powerful fraternal society, the Greek Catholic Union.

Therefore, when Bishop Ortynsky unexpectedly died in March 1916, it seemed most natural to the supporters of Dzubay — as well as to Dzubay himself — that he would become the new Greek Catholic bishop. The Vatican decided, however, not to make any episcopal appointment, and many Carpatho-Rusyns were displeased because he was from Galicia and of a Ukrainian national orientation. In order to mitigate such discontent among Carpatho-Rusyns, in 1913 Ortynsky designated Dzubay to be his diocesan vicar-general. The following year Dzubay’s influence among the laity rose even further, when he was elected spiritual director of the influential and by then powerful fraternal society, the Greek Catholic Union.

Despite Dzubay’s successes in the service of Orthodoxy, he was unable to secure a fully independent Carpatho-Rusyn diocese within the Russian Orthodox Church. Therefore, he tried another approach. Taking advantage of jurisdictional difficulties following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the rise of Soviet power in the Russian homeland, Dzubay proclaimed himself in October 1922, the “acting head” of the whole Russian Orthodox Church in America. This time Dzubay’s ambition seemed to have gone too far. Frustrated once again in his attempt to achieve the highest ecclesiastical posts, Dzubay renounced his Orthodox bishopric in 1924 and returned to the Greek Catholic Church. His stormy career was effectively over, so he spent his remaining years in seclusion at the Roman Catholic Monastery at Graymoor in Garrison, New York. Despite his own unfulfilled bid for power, the Reverend Alexander Dzubay did help to establish numerous parishes which continue to function today as part either of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church in America.

Philip Michaels
FOLK CUSTOMS OF CARPATHO-RUSYNS
BIRTH AND BAPTISM

Until recently, the number of children in Rusyn families was fairly high. The average was four or five per family, but even ten to fifteen children were not considered extraordinary. At the same time, a high mortality rate due to infantile diseases decreased their numbers. The only exception to this pattern could be found among the Rusyns in the Baćka region of northeastern Yugoslavia. As early as the nineteenth century, they established the so-called “one-child system,” in order to prevent progressive division of inheritance.

Childlessness was regarded among Rusyns as God’s punishment. Society treated childless women with disdain: they could not sit on a church bench; when at a wedding, they were forbidden to put the marriage cap on the bride’s head; they were not allowed to join their family at the table, and so on. However, a pregnancy occurring too soon after the wedding was not desirable either. In order to put it off, women used several “magic” tricks: a bride returning from the wedding ceremony sat down on as many of her fingers as she did not want to have children. Alternatively, she could make the appropriate number of bundles on her parta, a ribbon-like decoration on the bride’s head.

Pregnant women were generally held in high esteem. They were exempt from hard work, fed better than normally, and their wishes were satisfied generously. On the other hand, pregnant women had to respect a number of “magic” restrictions. They did not bake bread so that the child would not have a consuming “fire” in its body. They did not dry hemp and thus avoided tuberculosis (in Rusyn: suchoty, literally a “drying-up disease”). They did not eat hare meat so that the child would not suffer from harelip. They did not bathe in a stream so that the child would not drown. Other similarly motivated restrictions included leaping across fire or across a rope or shaft-bar, sitting on a grave or a log, looking into the sun, or watching something ugly. Pregnant women were also forbidden to stroke dogs, to touch an oven, to eat rotting food, to drink water after sundown, to steal, to become angry, to curse, and so on. In some villages, women in advanced pregnancy were forbidden to go into the fields for fear of hail destroying the crops. On the other hand, it was believed that if a pregnant woman walked around a burning house three times, the fire would cease to spread, or if she walked around a fruit tree, the yield would be higher.

The pregnant woman was expected to protect herself from so-called “unclean spirits.” For that purpose, she would wear or hold close to herself a piece of garlic, a knife, or another object made of iron. In order to make sure that the child would be attractive, the pregnant woman often looked at holy pictures. Even today some young pregnant women continue the practice, carrying instead, a photograph of a popular actor.

The childbirth itself was connected with a number of other customs. Normally, it took place at home with the assistance of a babka or povitucha, a midwife. When the childbirth was difficult, all the locks in the household were unlocked and all knots were loosened. If this was not “effective” enough, the woman was massaged, bathed in an extract of camomile, given wine or walked around the house, or even shaken in a trough.

Immediately after the birth, the midwife sprinkled the child with consecrated water and laid it on a sheep’s skin so that it would be healthy. Special precaution was taken not to lay the child with its feet pointing toward the door, for it was feared that this could lead to an early death. A list of appearance traits in the newborn interpreted in a superstitious manner could go on for pages: for instance, curly hair was believed to signify future wealth; clenched fists indicated tight-fistedness, and eyebrows grown together marked a future sage. A child born with a caul or “cap” on the head was expected to have good luck; whereas hair grown in the shape of two little wreas was believed to foreshadow foeshadow widowhood, and so on. Sometimes a newborn son was taken to the stable to be “introduced” to the cattle.

Great importance was attached to the child’s first bath. The parents would throw a coin, a grain, or a piece of garlic into the bath. Next to the tub they would lay a book, a pen, an axe, a scythe, a hammer, or a plowshare. If the baby was a girl, the parents would put a spindle, a needle, and a piece of thread into the water. This was believed to arouse a love of work and learning in the child from the very first moment. In order to make the child hardened against the cold, a pair of goose legs were dipped into the water before the bathing. The money taken out of the first bath was used as a reward for the midwife. The water from the first bath was spilled into the manure heap or into a place not frequented by people. This was also the place where the parents would bury the placenta.

When the bathing was over, the midwife usually made little “corrections” of the imperfections in the child’s appearance. She would shape the head, straighten the legs, make a dimple on the chin and on the cheeks. Then she would dress the child in a new shirt, or wrap it in a diaper and put it on the floor or under the table from where the father would pick it up and lay it on the table. This act was a symbolic manifestation of his fatherhood.

The mother’s bed was usually located in a corner of the room and curtained off with a piece of canvas. Here the mother was confined for six weeks after the birth, or at least until the baptism of the child. Prior to the baptism, a number of restrictions were in effect. Nothing could be taken out of the room, the mother could not turn her back on the child, nor could she leave it alone in the room because, it was feared, the “unclean spirits” would take the child and leave another in its place. Subcarpathian folklore includes a number of tales about “changelings” (odminy). In these tales, a good child was exchanged by a witch (bohynka, bosorka or povitulka) for a bad one. In order to prevent such an exchange, the child’s identity was marked by a piece of red thread bound on its wrist.

If the mother died in or after childbirth, the relatives usually wished that the child also die. They put the child to its dead mother’s breast or lay it next to her. If the child remained alive, it was believed that the ghost of the mother came in through the window at night to rock, bathe, and feed the child, so they left the window open, put water into the tub, and so on.

Immediately after childbirth and in the following weeks, the mother was visited by neighbors and close relatives who brought into “her corner” the best food available, such as chicken soup, meat, and cakes. In order to “fortify” herself if necessary, the mother kept in her corner a bottle of wine or even homemade brandy. Unlike the mother, the newborn child could be seen only by close relatives. They were ex-
The early death of the child. The cemetery adjoining the church, was believed to foreshadow a happy and contented life for the child, whereas baptismal feasts without much singing would predict a sad fate for the child. According to one of the songs recorded in the village of Kurov:

Ani toto kresna
Veselé nebude.
Ked’ mu chréna maty
Spivaty nebude.

The baptized child
Won’t be cheerful
If its godmother
Does not sing for it.
The main topic of the baptismal feast songs was praise for the mother, as in this song recorded in the town of Medzialborce, also in the Prešov Region:

A naša kumička
Jak jasna zornička
U polozí ležáte,
Dribnych rybok bažíť.
Chocby sja mi prýšlo
Po pas namocýt,
Ja kumočić mušu
Rybok nalavýty.

And so our dear woman
Like a clear morning star
Lies after the birth,
And wants to eat little fish.
Even if I were
To get wet up to my waist,
I much catch for her
Some fish.

Sometimes the songs make gentle fun of the godparents, as in this song recorded in the village of Kružlov, near Bardejov, in the Prešov Region:

Kresnij otec zaspal,
Krsna zadrimala,
Škoda tej parady
Ze sja tak prybrala.

The godfather fell asleep,
The godmother is dozing too,
So why did she bother to put on
That luxurious dress.

The baptismal feast usually lasted until night. If the guests were still singing on their way home, it was a sign to the village that the feast was a success.

According to church rules, the vyvid (the mother’s leaving her after-birth confinement) took place six weeks after the birth. However, many women tried to shorten this period and return to ordinary life and work as soon as possible. When the mother had given birth for the first time, she was accompanied to the ceremony of the vyvid by the midwife or mother-in-law. If the child was not the first-born, the mother would go to the ceremony by herself with the child. The usual recommendation to the mother going to the ceremony is usually connected with the baptism.

The birth of a child was also connected with other folk beliefs. It was believed that the next child would be of the same sex as the first person the mother met when going to the vyvid. If the mother did not wish to have any more children, she would dig an axe without a handle into the earth, or she would throw a closed lock without a key into a well.

At present, the pattern of childbirth in Subcarpathian Rus’ (Transcarpathia), the Prešov Region, as well as in the Bačka in Yugoslavia, is considerably different than in the past. Childbirth usually takes place in maternity hospitals with the assistance of doctors. However, some of the old customs and superstitions are still alive. In the countryside, even today, most parents have their child baptized in church, even if those parents are otherwise not church-goers. In such cases, the baptism is usually arranged by grandparents or other relatives. More widespread nowadays are the state-promoted ceremonies “welcoming the children to life,” organized by local authorities. These ceremonies represent an interesting symbiosis of old folk customs with present-day tendencies. Even at this “non-church baptism” godparents are chosen and traditional songs are sung at the subsequent feasts.

Mykola Mušynka
Prešov, Czechoslovakia

RECENT PUBLICATIONS 1981 (continued)


This brief article in Ukrainian by the leading specialist on Carpatho-Rusyn speech presents a revised classification scheme for dialects in Soviet Transcarpathia. Based primarily on lexical data, the author speaks of four Carpatho-Rusyn dialectal sub-groups in Transcarpathia: (1) Už dialects—between the Už and Latorycja valleys; (2) Borzava dialects between the Latorycja and Rika valleys; (3) Maramaros dialects—between the Rika and Sopourka valleys; and (4) Verchovyna dialects—northernmost mountainous regions of western and central Transcarpathia. Of these four subgroups, the author argues that the Maramaros dialects are the oldest.


The outdoor museum of folk architecture adjacent to the castle in Užhorod is a rich and easily accessible source of knowledge about life in traditional Carpatho-Rusyn villages. This guidebook in Russian (with 32 color illustrations and résumés Hungarian and Slovak) provides a good description of the various traditional houses transported from each region in the Transcarpathian oblast. Also included in this model village is a water mill, a tavern (korčma), and—the most impressive structure—the beautiful wooden church from Šelestovo (eighteenth century), complete with iconostasis.


Vasyl’ Grendža-Dons’kyj (1897-1974) was the most outstanding Ukrainian-language writer in Subcarpathian Rus’ during the interwar years and one of the most prolific writers to have come from the region. This volume, compiled by the author’s daughter Zirka Grendža-Dons’ka and with an introduction by Bohdan Romančuk, is intended as the first of a multivolume series that will reproduce most of the writer’s creative corpus.

Included are reprints or typewritten reproductions of Grendža-Dons’kyj’s first and most famous collections of poetry that appeared between 1923 and 1936 in Czechoslova­

This general survey by the Swedish Slavist Sven Gustavsson provides a useful introduction to the Vojvodinian or Bačka Rusyns of Yugoslavia. There are sections on settlement patterns (with map), language, national identity, and contemporary developments.


Following the model and virtually exact format of Josyp Dzendzelivs’kyj’s earlier linguistic atlases for the Transcarpathian oblast (Subcarpathian Rus’), Zuzana Hanuďel’ has produced the first linguistic atlas for the Carpatho-Rusyn dialects still spoken in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia. The author has chosen 126 words all dealing with domestic cooking and has surveyed their various dialectal forms in 125 villages from Štraňany in far western Spiš to Nová Sedlica in the far northeast of the Prešov Region.

Each word has its own map with an indication of its spoken form in all 125 villages. There are also 7 isogloss maps, 26 pages of explanations for each map (in Ukrainian), an index of every dialectal form that appears, a list of all place names surveyed, a comprehensive bibliography (over 500 entries) of studies on Carpatho-Rusyn dialects in the Prešov Region, and an introduction by the leading Carpatho-Rusyn dialectologist in neighboring Transcarpathia, Josyp Dzendzelivs’kyj. This work is an excellent beginning for what plans to be a comprehensive codification of the rich, albeit rapidly disappearing, Carpatho-Rusyn dialects.


According to official Czechoslovak statistics, the number of Ukrainian-Rusyns in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia has ranged from a low of 33,000 in 1961 to 41,000 in 1979, which is well below the 1930 census figure of 91,076. The author of this article attributes in part the problem of numerical fluctuation to the varying names given to the population—Ukrainian, Rusyn, Russian—designations which are not always combined in statistical calculations. This is also the first study to appear in a Ukrainian-language publication in the West, which points out that much of the problem stems from the forced implementation of an Ukrainian identity carried out upon the Carpatho-Rusyn inhabitants of the Prešov Region during the 1950’s.

J.V.K. “Podkarpatská Rus a dokumenty k její anexii So­větským Svazem v letech 1944-1945” (Subcarpathian Rus’ and Documents Concerning its Annexation to the Soviet Union in the Years 1944-1945), Československá cesta, I, 3-4 (Kanata, Ontario, 1981), pp. 40-44.

This brief article and eight documents (all in Czech) from previously published works by F. Němec, V. Moudry, and J. Brugel are intended to underline Soviet territorial designs on Subcarpathian Rus’ at the close of World War II.


Svaljava is a small town that lies in the foothills of the Carpathians, about 15 miles northeast of Mukachevo in former Bereg county (today the Transcarpathian oblast). This short guide with texts in Ukrainian and Russian and 32 photographs provides a brief historical background and description of the town at the present.


Antimensia are altar cloths used in Eastern Christian Churches either for portable use or in fixed placement on a consecrated altar. They usually have an embroidered representation, or icon, depicting the Deposition from the Cross or the Entombment of Christ. This handsome catalog shows 22 antimensia that belonged to the Greek Catholic bishops of the Carpatho-Rusyn dioceses of Mukachevo (1716-1924) and Prešov (1816-1960); the Hungarian diocese of Hajdú­dorog (1913-1972); the Croatian-Rusyn diocese of Kríževci (1914-1940); and the Byzantine Rite Catholic Archdiocese in the United States (1907-present).

The catalog includes a photographic reproduction of each antimensium, followed by a transcription (in the original Old Slavonic with English translation) of the dedication that appears on each altar cloth. Introductions by the Reverend Archimandrite Januaruis M. Izzo and by the compilers describe the general function of antimensia and their historic importance for Carpatho-Rusyn culture.

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