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A report on the Lemko Association and the Carpathian Institute of the USA in 2017

Preface

To make it clear, we do not refer here to the Carpatho-Rusyn Society¹ of Munhall (a town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), founded in 1991, which is headquartered in its own building (that of an abandoned Greek Catholic Cathedral – a copy of the Cathedral in Uzhgorod) and which has its own bi-monthly publication, “New Rusyn Times”², nor the Rusin Association³ of Minneapolis, Minnesota which puts out the on-line magazine, “Trembita”. There are two other Lemko related organizations also not represented in this report: the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, founded in 1974, with a mail address at Grand Isle, Vermont and a library at the University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. (This library was assembled by Prof. Paul R. Magocsi and is said to be the largest collection of Carpatho-Rusyn materials in the world, counting about 40,000 items). The other is the Organization for the Defense of the Lemko Region, Western Ukraine⁴, founded in 1934, whose political orientation is seen in its title.

The main report

In volume II of *Lemkowie, Bojkowie, Rusini (Lemkos, Boykos and Rusyns)*, published in 2009, there was a short article⁵, which was written based on materials available at the

¹ See: *Carpatho-Rusyn Society* [in:] R. Magocsi, P. Robert and I. Pop (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*, revised and expanded edition, Toronto 2005, p. 60.

² See: *New Rusyn Times*, [in:] R. Magocsi, P. Robert and I. Pop (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 352.

³ See: *Rusin Association of Minnesota*, [in:] R. Magocsi, P. Robert and I. Pop (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 423.

⁴ See: *the Organization for the Defense of the Lemko Region, Western Ukraine*, [in:] R. Magocsi, P. Robert and I. Pop (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 423.

⁵ P.J. Best, *Lemko-Sojuz USA i Kanady. Krótki przegląd dziejów*, [in:] *Lemkowie, Bojkowie, Rusini. Historia, współczesność, kultura materialna i duchowa*, Tom II, S. Dudra, B. Halczak, I. Betko, Michał M. Śmigiel (eds.), Zielona Góra-Słupsk 2009, pp. 29-37.

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beginning of that year. In the eight years since that time there has been a radical change in the fortunes of the Lemko Association.

To summarize the pre-2009 situation⁶, the Lemko Association (hereinafter referred to as LA) is the oldest continuously existing Lemko-Rusyn organization on the planet, having been founded in 1929 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The founding leader was Theodore Kochan, about whom little is known, although a water color picture of him in his US Army uniform from the time of the Spanish American War can be found among the artifacts held by the Carpathian Institute (hereinafter referred to as CI). Another founder, apparently, was Dmitri Vyslotsky⁷. Why a small group of Lemkos decided to set up their own organization when there were many Russian and Ukrainian secular and religious societies available is a matter of speculation, but certainly they must have thought that there was enough difference between themselves and other East Slavs to do so.

Already in 1928, Vyslotsky had started publishing a newspaper, "Lemko", in Cleveland, Ohio where he had settled, after arriving the year before. Vyslotsky had been involved in publishing a newspaper of the same name in Galicia, 1911-1913, in the lead up to World War I. After surviving Thalerhof, being sentenced to death in the Second Vienna Process, and during the rest of World War I, Vyslotsky published several "Lemko" items in Presov and Uzhgorod, before emigrating to Canada in 1922 and the USA in 1927.

LA and the Lemko newspaper were united in Cleveland at the second convention of the LA in 1931. The organization, but not the newspaper, was first registered in the state of Ohio in 1933.

Parenthetically, we must insert here a little about US and Canadian law for those who don't know the complications. The USA has 57 genuine jurisdictions, 50 states, 6 territories and the overarching federal system of law – each jurisdiction has real power. Canada similarly has 12 provinces and several territories of various types, each of which has its specific powers. Thus, in establishing a legal organization in the USA (or Canada) one needs to register in a particular state (province) and to consult legal counsel in order to do things properly – frequently Lemkos would merrily cruise along rather than pay lawyers' fees. Thus, the LA was never quite really in order until its move to Higganum, Connecticut, USA in 2010. The Canadian section went its own legal way and, while representatives did attend Lemko conventions, it had its own organization, something greatly encouraged by the Canadian government – in fear of being overwhelmed by Americans – and it eventually went out of existence in the 1970s.

The editorial offices of "Lemko" and the organizational offices of the association were variously located in Cleveland, Philadelphia (where Vyslotsky reconnected with Simeon Pyzh, sometimes editor of the Russian language newspaper, "Pravda", a publication

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 29-34.

⁷ See: *Dmitri Vyslotsky* [in:] R. Magocsi, P. Robert and I. Pop (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 363.

of the Russian Brotherhoods Organization) and then to New York state where for a few years the offices were on the island of Manhattan. In 1939, a significant move was made when the newspaper and the offices found a home at the newly constructed Lemko Hall of the Carpatho-Russian American Center, Incorporated (hereinafter CRAC), on Yonkers Avenue in the city of Yonkers, just north of New York City proper, at a dollar a year rent. The offices stayed there for 60 years, until 1999. At the same time as the move, the newspaper "Lemko", changed its name to "Karpatska Rus"/"Carpathian Rus" (hereinafter referred to as KR) in a rather interesting merger. It seems the efemerial Carpatho-Russian Congress had once again appeared, this time in New York City, and it had started, in 1939, to publish a monthly KR and Simeon Pyzh was able to convince the editors of the new publication to merge with "Lemko" in such a way that the name of "Lemko" was changed but the "Lemko" numbering system was maintained, thus issue number 2 in January, 1940 was numbered volume XII, No.2 of, believe it or not, KR. Perhaps another reason for the name change was the desire to assure other Carpatho-Rusyns that Lemko didn't only included Carpatho-Rusyns in the western half of Carpathian Rus' but also the eastern half, Podkarpatska Rus' (Subcarpathian Rus').

The LA was clearly a socialist, anti-clerical organization to the end of World War II, when Vyslotsky left for Poland. He ended up deported to the Soviet Union, first to Uzhgorod and then to Lviv, until December 1968 when he passed away – but all that is another story. Simeon Pyzh, while a Russophile of sorts, did think of Karpatska Rus' as a separate East Slavic territory which had its own language, history, culture and religion⁸. He died in Yonkers in 1956.

In the 1960s, under the direction of refugees from the Polish Communist regime, there was an attempt to tone down the pro-Soviet, pro-Russian direction of the LA but this failed. However, that attitude in the Cold War period led to a decline in LA membership. Several other failures also led to a loss of members. First, a mountain retreat, called the Lemko Resort, was established in the Catskill Mountains, Monroe, New York, in the late 1970s, north of New York City. Lemkos invested in this business by purchasing stock. It, however, went bankrupt in the 1990s due to financial and organizational mismanagement. This led to a general disgust with Lemko leaders who were involved in this activity, even though the Lemko Resort was not attached in any legal way to LA, in fact LA lost thousands of dollars too.

The final straw in the downfall of LA was the collapse of CRAC's Lemko Hall in Yonkers which had to be sold off for back taxes owed to the City of Yonkers. CRAC, the owner of the building, had lost its tax exemption in the 1970s because it had been reduced to a beer and banquet hall without any educational or social meaning. LA and KR decamped to Allentown, New Jersey (not Allentown, Pennsylvania), to the property of Alexander Herenchak, the last President of the old LA. A pot of 300,000 dollars remains

⁸ See his *Short History of Carpathian Rus'*, translation by Paul J. Best, Andrew J. Yurowsky, Michael Decerbo, Higganum 2016.

with CRAC but that organization has no pretensions to doing anything for Lemkos in general in the way of education or culture, i.e. it shows no redeeming societal value, thus cannot be a tax-exempt entity again. It is only a social club.

Herenchak, a pronounced Russophile and an adherent of the Russian Orthodox Church, who was directly involved in the loss of both the Lemko Resort and Lemko Hall, was assisted by his childhood friend, Victoria Windish/Windisch, as Treasurer. She was of the same orientation and attended a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church directly attached to the Moscow Patriarchate. All Lemko physical assets – papers, books, artifacts – went into three storage areas, at no-cost to the Pool House of Herenchak and the house of Victoria. A third storage area was a commercial storage unit in Cooksville, New Jersey at 125 dollars a month. This went on for 10 years because Herenchak refused an offer of transferral of physical objects to Higganum, Connecticut for no-cost storage – LA lost 15,000 dollars on that decision before transfer was actually made in 2010. Financial assets were divided between Herenchak and Windish.

Neither Herenchak nor Windish were willing to do anything of value for LA during the 10-year period 2000-2010, except for an annual Thalerhof commemoration and putting out an occasional KR, somewhat like the dog in the manger allegory.

2010-2017 – the last eight years

The late summer of 2009 and early spring of 2010 brought major changes. In August 2009, Windish suddenly died without financial records being in order and Herenchak, it turned out, was already deathly ill with cancer. Mary Barker, as Secretary, and the author as Vice-President, attempted to reach Herenchak during the fall of 2009 and winter 2010, while he was being transferred between various hospitals. He had last been elected President in 2005 and a new convention of LA was long overdue. When finally reached physically in his home in March 2010, Herenchak claimed everything was fine and he'd be up in two weeks and take care of business. He died in April 2010. Fortunately, in the interim, Michael Windisch, Victoria's son, through the intervention of Baker, agreed to put aside any LA materials he found during the six months it took him to clean out the family home for sale. Between fall 2009 and spring 2010 five van loads of materials were transferred to the CI in Higganum, Connecticut. In Spring 2010, Barker and the author decided to call a LA convention at the CI. At that May meeting the by-laws, heretofore 19 pages long, were reduced to one page and the Executive Committee to only four officers. Initially the officers were: President – Paul Best, Vice-President – Walter Maximovich, Secretary – Ivan Madzik, Treasurer – Mary Barker. Subsequently Maximovich resigned, Madzik left due to severe illness in his family and Barker retired. Thus, today we have: President – Paul Best, Vice-President – Michael Decerbo, Secretary – Bogdan Horbal, Treasurer – Robert John Klancko.

The official headquarters of LA are now at those of CI. CI is a project of Inter-Ed, Inc. (International Education, Incorporated), an educational and charitable organization,

founded in 1974, under rules of the US Federal Internal Revenue Service, as a 501(C)(3) tax-exempt corporation. Under the umbrella of Inter-Ed are the CI and LA. Also, the same facilities are the home of the New England Chapter of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, which is incorporated under a different 501(C)(3) designation and KR, our periodical which is now a limited Liability Corporation (LLC). Inter-Ed, Inc, has a Connecticut State non-profit tax exemption. Thus, all the entities are fully protected under federal and state law, a situation which had not been obtained before the move to Higganum, Connecticut in Spring 2010. Higganum is half way between New York City and Boston, in the Northeast, USA, the New England section.

Concomitant with saving and reorganizing LA and KR was the recovery of fiscal assets, undertaken under the direction of our legal counsel, William Bowles, Esq. The Executive Committee began a search for financial assets and found that 60,000 dollars existed, 40,000 dollars had escheated to the State of New Jersey because of apparent abandonment of the funds. A legal process was initiated to get these monies back while the Windish and Herenchak estates yielded an additional 20,000 dollars.

Further, the Cooksville unit and the Pool House storage area were cleaned out in an additional five truck loads, under the supervision of Herenchak's widow and two of his nephews.

Initially the recovered materials were kept under tarpaulins at CI. These materials, which were contained in miscellaneous shaped boxes and bags had to be sorted out and properly stored. Artifacts, books, periodicals and archives were integrated into CI collections. This necessitated the purchase of two artifacts storage sheds, two archival buildings, one small office building and a large library structure. Also, a Thalerhof Memorial gazebo was placed on the highest part of the 60 acre/20 hectare CI property.

Today CI of Inter-Ed, Inc, LA, the New England Carpatho-Rusyn Society and KR quarterly hold annual Thalerhof commemorations on the first Saturday of August. The Thalerhof commemorations now include remembrance of the Jaworzno concentration camp and all those who suffered between 1914 and 1952 in the Carpathian homeland. Popular/academic discussions are also held in various venues.

More important are our informational activities; there is the web-site Lemkoassociation.org and our quarterly periodical. KR is usually divided into two parts, a community section, News & Information and an informative academic section, Articles & Reports.

We are particularly proud of our publication programme, under the imprint of the LA and the CI:

1. Histories:

- a) *Lemkovyna: A History of the Lemko Region of the Carpathian Mountains in Central Europe*, written by Father Ioann Polianskii (writing as I.F.Lemkin), translated and edited by Paul Best, Michael Decerbo and Walter Maximovich, 2012, 374 pages, including a dedication, forward, preface, acknowledgements, notes on terminology and translation and an introduction. The main body of this book is

a translation of Polianskii's Lemko language *Istoriya Lemkovyny (A History of the Lemko Region)* published by the Lemko Association in 1969. The last 122 pages of the publication include two appendices *The Historical and Linguistic Context* and *Ioann Polianskii, his life and times – an autobiography* plus a discussion of archival material in the Przemyśl archive. This book is available in hard and soft binding along with a copy of the 1969 original, a slip case is available, if desired, for the original and the translation.

- b) *Simeon Pyzh's 1938 Short History of Carpathian Rus'*, translated by Andrew Yurkovsky and Paul Best, edited by Paul Best and Michael Decerbo, 2016, 136 pages plus illustrations, dedication, a biography of Pyzh and notes. In order to prevent any claims of perversion of the original text, in which Pyzh clearly states that Carpathian Rus' exists and that its people have a distinct culture, history and language, which ought to be taught, and which is neither Ukrainian nor Russian, the original Cyrillic text is included as an appendix. This was done in order to have a comparison available- the first translation, done in the 1970s, erroneously translated every use of the word *Rus* as *Russia*. There have been no complaints so far.

2. Maps:

The Carpathian Institute and the Lemko Association appear to be suffering from Cartophilia and thus have published:

- a) Lemkovyna (Western Carpathian Rus), 1-200,000, a full colored large topographical of the western half of the Carpathian Rus';
- b) Karpatska Rus', 1-400,000, full colored topographical map;
- c) A spiral bound copy and translation of a 1937 map published by the Lemko Association;
- d) A ring binder containing copies of all known maps of Carpathian Rus' including a copy of Prof. Magocsi's Carpatho-Rusyn Settlement map and gazetteer.

3. Other publications:

- a) *The Lemko Region, 1939-1947: War, Occupation, and Deportation*, edit. P. Best, J. Moklak, 2002. 272 pages and 4 maps. A second revised and expanded edition is expected in 2019;
- b) *The Lemkos*, edit. P. Best, J. Moklak, (second edition, revised and expanded), 2013, 463 pages;
- c) *Does a Fourth Rus' Exist: Concerning cultural identity in the Carpathian Regions*, edit. P. Best, S. Stepien, 2009, 264 pages

4. Flags:

- a) "Carpathian Rus'" flag 3x5 feet, full color, polyester;
- b) "Lemko Republic" flag 3x5 feet, full color, polyester;
- c) "Table size Carpathian Rus' flag", with a small support stand.

5. Smaller publications:

- a) *Information for Carpatho-Rusyns*, 42 pages;
- b) *The Carpathian Institute: Catalog of Educational Materials* 20 pages.

6. Our Periodical

- a) “Karpatska Rus”/“Carpathian Rus”, a quarterly of Carpathian information, now in its 88th volume year.

7. Of special interest:

Of special interest are the 8 volumes published in December 2016 by Prof. Jarosław Moklak, *Historica Jagiellonica* and the History Institute of the Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland, and with the assistance of the LA and the CI. Moklak was able to get a grant under the National Programme for the Development of the Humanities, sponsored by the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Under terms of this grant Moklak was able to come to the CI four times, for two weeks each, over a two-year period. He made a thorough study of the scholarly value of all the materials deposited in Carpathian Institute buildings. He was required to publish his results by December 2016, the end of the grant. Here are the results of his work:

- a) *Stary i Nowy Kraj: Publicystyka Polityczna Wania Hunianka, Cleveland, 1933 (The political journalism of Vanyo Hunianka [Dmitrii Vysotsky], Cleveland Ohio, 1933)*, 224 pages;
- b) *Dokumenty i materiały do dziejów Łemków ze zbiorów Instytutu Karpackiego w Higganum, Connecticut, USA – Katalog (Documents and Materials on the History of the Lemkos from the collections of the Carpathian Institute in Higganum, Connecticut, USA – A Catalog)*, 62 pages;
- c) *Materiały organizacyjne instytucji łemkowskich w Ameryce (Organizational Materials of Lemko Institutions in America) część pierwsza (part one)*, 241 pages;
- d) *Materiały organizacyjne instytucji łemkowskich w Ameryce, część druga (part two)*, 181 pages;
- e) *Łemkowska twórczość literackana emigracji (Lemko Literary Activity in Emigration), część pierwsza (part one)*, 241 pages;
- f) *Łemkowska twórczość literackana emigracji, część druga (part two)*, 200 pages;
- g) *Protokoły zjazdów Lemko-Sojuza, 1931-1935 (Protocols of Lemko Association Congresses, 1931-1935)*, in the original Cyrillic text, 191 pages;
- h) *Protokoły zjazdów Lemko-Sojuza, 1936-1939*, 254 pages.

This is a truly phenomenal collection, eight volumes with 1500 pages. We must really be grateful to the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Jagiellonian University for sponsoring Moklak in doing this arduous work. Moklak hopes for further support to study the time period of 1940 to the present.

To sum up, in 2009, the end point of our previous report, LA was proverbially a dead duck”. However, the Executive Committee of LA was completely changed, beginning in

2010, after the passing of two officers, and in combination with CI it was saved, strengthened, and revitalized. Thus, eight years later we find a fully legal, tax-exempt, non-profit, non-sectarian, non-political organization completely engaged in supporting study of Carpathian culture, religion, history and language.

Further LA and CI invite cooperation with all who have an interest in the Carpathian Region and its Diaspora, regardless of religious, national or political orientation, as long as views are presented in a scholarly and non-aggressive way.

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Abstract: This paper reports on the recent revival of the Lemko Association (Lemko Soyuz) in North America, under the auspices of the Carpathian Institute, a US federal and Connecticut state recognized tax-exempt, non-profit, non-political, non-sectarian educational corporation. The Lemko Association, founded in 1929, had become essentially defunct by the end of 2009. Beginning in 2010, however, in a new location and new legal status it has been revived, publishing a quarterly, "Karpatska Rus'", books, pamphlets and flags and arranging for lectures.

Keywords: Lemko Association, Carpathian Institute, Lemkos, United States of America

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