

## THE CARPATHO-RUSYN MICROFILM PROJECT

*Bogdan Horbal, a young scholar residing in New York City, has been studying materials in the Carpatho-Rusyn Microfilm Project for the last few years. In this article he introduces himself and discusses his work on the project.*  
—Editor

I was born in Poland. My parents are Lemkos, that is, Carpatho-Rusyns living in the historic province of Galicia north of the Carpathian Mountains. I studied history at the University of Wrocław in Poland. The title of my master's thesis was "Political Activity Among the Lemkos from 1918 to 1921." The thesis covers only three years, yet it was the only period in the history of the Lemkos when they not only talked about the future, but actually tried to shape our own people's destiny. At numerous meetings, Lemko activists (mostly Greek Catholic priests, teachers, lawyers, and educated peasants) raised the case of the Carpatho-Rusyns in Galicia and put pressure on the Paris Peace Conference to grant Lemkos the right of self-determination.

At that time, the most prevalent national orientation among Carpatho-Rusyns on the northern slopes of the Carpathians was the Russian or Russophile orientation. Large numbers of Lemkos believed that they were a subgroup of the Russian nationality. Hence, they wanted to be unified with "Mother Russia." Only a few Lemkos espoused a Rusyn or a Ukrainian identity and supported these orientations. Today the situation is much different. The only politically viable national orientations are the Rusyn and the Ukrainian. The Russian orientation belongs to the past and no longer has any political influence.

I began my research already in Poland. In the beginning it was very difficult. Nobody had written on Lemko politics of 1918-1921 in any detail. In addition, I had much difficulty finding even primary sources. Archives in Cracow and Przemyśl contained some interesting materials, and Polish newspapers of that time also paid some attention to events in the Lemko Region. Although I found little, I was nevertheless satisfied because our knowledge of the Lemko Republic was so small that whatever I found was important. I wrote a small article for a Lemko newspaper in Poland in which I offered new information. After I managed to prepare the first chapter of my thesis, I decided to continue my search for historical materials in the United States.

While still in Poland, I learned about the New York Public Library and discovered that its Slavic section was vast and excellent, but I did not know anything about the Carpatho-Rusyn Microfilm Project collection. I cannot describe adequately my surprise when I discovered this collection. For starters, I had not known about the collection's printed *Guide to Newspapers and Periodicals*. The first time I accessed the collection I was given an entire catalogue drawer. I began taking notes and suddenly realized that it contained a whole lifetime's supply of information not for a single researcher, but for an entire group of researchers. I knew that the only way of working with this collection was to read systematically one item after another. I was so ecstatic that I wanted to request all of the newspapers at once.

What should I read first? What a great and wonderful decision to have to make! I was like a kid in a candy store, and not very organized at first. I ordered one reel of the

*Amerykanskij russkij viestnik*, one reel of *Karpatorusskij kalendar Lemko-Sojuza*, and also one reel of *Prikarpatskaja Rus'*, and so on. And thus the whole unknown world of Carpatho-Rusyn immigration was uncovered for me. I learned about different political parties, church orientations, social and cultural organizations among Carpatho-Rusyns—the list goes on. It was a fascinating and large immigrant community, but unfortunately divided against itself.

The collection I discovered changed my view of the thesis. In Poland I had learned a little about activities of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States. Of course, I hoped to find more information about the immigrant community here, but I never expected to come across such a significant number of American Carpatho-Rusyn newspapers or to gain such insights into Carpatho-Rusyn political, cultural, and even military life throughout the world.

What were some of the specific pieces of information that emerged from my search? I learned, for instance, about the League for the Liberation of Carpatho-Russia, which was formed in New York City in 1917. Two years later, the league sent a four-person delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in order to represent Carpatho-Rusyns. Three congresses organized by this group took place between 1917 and 1920. The last one was attended by 300 delegates and guests. The Carpatho-Rusyn delegates in Europe did not stay only in Paris. They went to London, Geneva, and Rome to talk about the "old country's" fate.

I also discovered the existence of the Carpatho-Rusyn Committee and small military units which were formed by Carpatho-Rusyn prisoners-of-war in Italy. Similar activity took place in the Russian city of Rostov-on-the-Don. A military unit created there joined the anti-Bolshevik White forces of Russian General Kornilov and fought by his side in the Kuban region of Ukraine. The Rus' National Council of Carpathian Rus' (Russka Narodna Rada Prikarpatskoj Rusi), then based in Rostov-on-the-Don, was forced by the Bolsheviks to leave the city and to move thousands of miles eastward through Siberia to Vladivostok on the Pacific coast. From there six Carpatho-Rusyn leaders went to Japan and then to San Francisco. Those members of the organization who did not go east sailed across the Black Sea to Bulgaria or Turkey, eventually making their way to Czechoslovakia through the Balkans.

In the meantime, another group of Carpatho-Rusyns, led by a Lemko, Dr. Adrian Kopystjanskij, formed in Russia another Carpatho-Rusyn organization—the Carpatho-Russian Council (Karpatorusskij Sovit). Its first congress took place in the Siberian city of Cheljabinsk, while the second one was in Omsk. Two Carpatho-Rusyn military units were also formed there and fought against the Bolsheviks in Siberia.

Information from all over the world came to New York City to the office of the League for the Liberation of Carpatho-Russia, whose name was later changed to the Carpatho-Russian National Organization in America. The organization published the newspaper *Prikarpatskaja Rus'*. The microfilm collection I am working with contains only the first two years of this publication, but there are other newspapers. Among them are *Pravda* (Truth), published by the Russian Brotherhood Organization, and *Svit* (Light), published by the Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society of the U. S. A.

There is no calculating the time or money it would take to accomplish my research were I forced to travel to London, Paris, or Rome for such material. Instead, I am able to do my work in one place thanks to the efforts of the Carpatho-Rusyn Microfilm Project which collected and compiled so much material. Is there any chance that after the terrible years of revolution and civil war in Russia between 1917 and 1921, and after so many years of destructive communist rule, there might still be Carpatho-Rusyn-related materials somewhere in Rostov-on-the-Don, Cheljabinsk, or Omsk? I doubt it very much. But how convenient for now that I can sit in the New York Public Library and read about Carpatho-Rusyn activists visiting the American ambassador in Tokyo, Japan in the middle of 1919! My heartfelt thanks goes out to all those who have donated money to enlarge the Carpatho-Rusyn microfilm collection. Their gift benefits scholars everywhere.

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**Postscript:** The Carpatho-Ruthenian Microfilm Project was created in 1975 at the Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, with a matching grant in the amount of \$12,500 each from the Byzantine Ruthenian Metropolitan Province (at the time headed by Archbishop Stephen J. Kocisko) and the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington, D. C. Upon completion in 1979, copies of the complete collection were deposited in the Slavic and Baltic Division of the New York Public Library, the University of Pittsburgh Library, and the John Carroll University Library in Cleveland, Ohio. Professor Frank Renkiewicz prepared *The Carpatho-Ruthenian Microfilm Project: A Guide to Newspapers and Periodicals* (Minneapolis, 1979).

A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

### THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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## THE INTERNATIONAL WORK OF THE CARPATHO-RUSYN RESEARCH CENTER

Ever since its establishment in 1978, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center has followed a policy of sending gratis its publications to students and scholars in east-central Europe who request our materials. Before 1989-1991, when Communist regimes were still in power, those researchers who received our materials were privately grateful but unable to mention in their own writings that some of their sources were from the "capitalist West." Moreover, many aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn history simply could not be discussed in the Soviet Union or in neighboring countries in the Soviet sphere.

Since the Revolution of 1989, however, things have changed. The C-RRC continues to send its materials gratis, knowing that researchers in east-central Europe do not have the economic means to purchase our books. In contrast to the "old days," all aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn history and culture can be discussed today, and the work of the C-RRC is publicly acknowledged. We are particularly pleased to be able to assist a younger generation of students in east-central Europe. The following letter from a university student in the Czech town of Hradec Králové, addressed to Professor Paul Robert Magocsi, president of the C-RRC, is indicative of the kind of contacts that have become possible in the new post-1989 world.

Dear Professor:

First of all, I would like to thank you very much for all the publications sent last summer which for me are invaluable.

Last week [November 1995] in Ostrava there was a student scholarly competition called History '95, in which I participated and presented the results of my work on the topic, "The Autumn of 1938 in Subcarpathian Rus'." I must admit that I did not expect that this subject would provoke such a great response in general as well as among the panel of expert judges. One of the members of the panel was Professor Jaroslav Mezník of Masaryk University in Brno. I learned for the first time that he is the son of the late Dr. Mezník, who was for a time [during the interwar years] the Czech vice-governor of Subcarpathian Rus'. Professor Mezník recommended that I research the papers of his father which are held in the Moravian Regional Archive in Brno.

In the end, of the 17 presentations submitted at the scholarly competition, mine was awarded first place, for which I must thank you, since the publications you sent were an indispensable source of information in the course of my work

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### OUR FRONT COVER

Graphic image of the World Wide Web site for the **Carpatho-Rusyn Knowledge Base**.