"Canadians and Ukrainians Inseparably"
Recent Writing on the History of Ukrainian Settlement in Canada

_The Review of Ukrainian Studies_, vol. 16, no. 2


The year 1991 marked the start of two years of celebrations marking the first mass immigration of Ukrainians to Canada. One hundred years after the arrival of Pylypow and Eleniak, Ukrainians can look back with some pride at the strides they have made in that time. After all the Governor-General, the Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, a supreme court Justice, several provincial premiers and cabinet ministers join nearly one million other Canadians who can trace part of their heritage to the legacy of Ukrainian settlement in this country. No longer the stalwart peasants in sheepskin coats of Canadian myth — the primary “visible minority” in the Canadian West at the turn of the century — this community has now become part of the silent Canadian majority. Although still proud and conscious of its heritage and history, this community is at the same time increasingly indistinguishable from its compatriots. Indeed, Ukrainians have in many ways become the quintessential Canadian ethnic community — dedicated to participating in the mainstream, yet tenacious in asserting their distinctive identity.

In conjunction with the celebration of the centennial of Ukrainian settlement in Canada several new publications have appeared documenting the history of this community’s development on the North American continent. Three of these include Orest Subtelny’s, _Ukrainians in North America: An Illustrated History_, Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk’s, _Canada’s Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity_ and Orest Martynowych’s _Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, 1891-1924_. Each brings new insight to the study of the Ukrainian experience in Canada while at the same time carrying their own biases and historiographical limitations.
important, and newly accessioned, photographs in Saskatchewan and Alberta, like the marvelous images in the Gavinchuk and Fedoruk collections, remain largely unpublished and unknown.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of Subtelny's presentation of these images is the gratuitous editorializing which occasionally accompanies them. An unidentified Pennsylvania coal mine town (p.18) with an unidentified “Eastern rite” church is described as “probably” having included many Ukrainians. A daughter's American clothing is contrasted to her mother's more traditional attire (p.33) and then interpreted as an indication of her being “well on the way to successfully adapting to American way of life” — at best a superficial observation. A Galician photographed in Calgary in 1903 (p.40) is described as being “clearly confused by the urban surroundings”, although nothing of the sort is clear from the photograph. The interior of a settler's home (p.42) is interpreted as a spectacle of “poverty”, a traditional bent willow cradle as “makeshift” and a portrait of Shevchenko as somehow incongruous in the setting. On occasion Subtelny is incorrect in the identification of photographs: for example, the photograph on p.86, identified as the Plum Ridge School at Pleasant Home Manitoba, is in fact the Kolomea S.D.# 1505 in east central Alberta.

Subtelny, a specialist in 18th century Cossack relations by training, does not always make a smooth transition to North American immigration history. This volume emphasizes the “impact that Ukrainian (and generally European) conditions, events and concepts continued to exert on Ukrainians living in the North American environment”, and how in North America the arrivals made a concerted effort to develop the national identity that had been oppressed in Europe. As a result Subtelny tends to concentrate on new arrivals and not on the retention of identity through generations. He is so preoccupied with European politics and with divisions within the Ukrainian nationalist movement that Ukrainian participation in Canadian and American political history receives scant mention. Similarly, in discussing the Second World War, we learn more about those Ukrainians who served in the 14th Grenadier Waffen SS Galicia Division than about the tens of thousands of Ukrainian Canadians and Americans who served their countries during that conflict.

This lack of sensitivity for the indigenous nature of Ukrainian-Canadian history is reflected in Subtelny's Eurocentric and inaccurate thesis (p.109) that all Ukrainian organizations in Canada had “Old Country roots and orientations”, that they all failed to adjust to the North American environment and that they “did not have intellectuals capable of making ideological innovations”.

The most perceptive chapters deal with the Displaced Persons, “D.Ps”, who arrived in North America after the Second World War, the contemporary Ukrainian diaspora, and the dramatic changes taking place in Ukraine during the 1980s and 90s. It is this more recent immigration, especially to the United States, with which the author is most familiar and for which he has the greatest insight. The weakness of the work stems from its insensitivity to the indigenous features of Ukrainian life in Canada and the United States. For these reasons the volume might as easily have been titled “the Ukrainians Coming to North America” rather than “the Ukrainians in North America”.

In contrast to Subtelny's broad survey, Luciuk and Hryniuk's collection of articles presents twenty separate contributions to the history of Ukrainians in Canada. It is an ambitious project with a diverse set of papers covering the entire span of the community’s one hundred year history and offering new insights into how and why Ukrainians came to Canada, how they interacted amongst themselves, and how the larger society and the Canadian state interacted with them. The papers share a general concern with how Ukrainians came to think of themselves as a people within Canada and are divided by theme into three sections dealing with immigration and settlement, internal community politics, and finally relations with the Canadian state.

Overall this volume provides an excellent illustration of the new historiographical directions reshaping the study of Ukrainians in Canada. Most scholars now have little interest in descriptive or filiopietistic accounts or in advancing particular ideological or religious concerns. Instead, researchers have gone back to Canadian and European archival sources and tried to integrate new photographic evidence and a growing body of oral history into a revisionist reinterpretation of both the Ukrainian and more broadly the immigrant experience in Canada. As a result the history, geography and sociology of Ukrainian Canadians has become less a specialized subfield of scholarship of interest only to other Ukrainian Canadians than a significant part of a broader scholarly discourse on the interrelationships between ethnicity, class and gender. This current vigour in Ukrainian-Canadian studies contrasts sharply with the state of Ukrainian-American studies. Not since the pioneering works of Julian Bachynsky and Wasyl Halich has anyone ventured beyond the well-trodden paths of the northeast seaboard, Pennsylvania, and urban America to try and systematically document the Ukrainian-American experience. Moreover, outside of some excellent work being produced under the aegis of the Ukrainian Cultural Institute at Dickinson State University in North Dakota, rural Ukrainian America continues to remain largely terra incognita.

Although space does not permit review of all of the pieces within this collection, several have a particular interest either because they reflect new trends in Ukrainian-Canadian studies or because they bring special insight to centennial celebrations.

While the Liberal administration of Wilfrid Laurier and his Minister of Interior Clifford Sifton is synonymous with the championing of Ukrainian immigration to Canada, Jaroslav Petrshyn suggests that their commitment to this policy has been greatly exaggerated. The Liberals were more accurately ambivalent, if not as hostile as their parliamentary opponents, to the influx of East European immigrants. The Department of the Interior attempted in
fact "to diminish, if not severely restrict, the flow of Galicians and Bukovynians. This was evident in its [obstructionist] dealings with [Joseph] Oleskyv and in the monetary and later numerical stipulations that it sought to impose on the immigrants".

James Darlington offers a case study of a Ukrainian cultural landscape in the block settlement area north of Dauphin Manitoba, particularly its initial development and its persistence over time. This is an interesting study in historical geography, but his contentions that Ukrainian settlers were not fully integrated into Canadian life until the end of the Second World War, that they resisted acculturation, and that there are only two active Ukrainian Catholic parishes remaining in the area are debatable. Similarly his attribution of changing cemetery headstone shapes to a decline in the importance of religion within Ukrainian society is misplaced and better explained by changing fashions in funeral customs, often encouraged by commercial interests, and a decline in traditional folk artisans. Nevertheless, he presents a compelling case for the study and preservation of a cultural landscape which is both a vital part of the western Canadian landscape and a rapidly disappearing one. His suggestion that buildings and artifacts be preserved in situ, thereby capturing a far more comprehensive and authentic perspective of the cultural landscape within rural preservation districts is well taken. Quite correctly he also notes that unless something is done within the next few years, much of what is worth preserving will be lost, with the whole of Canada being the poorer for it.

Brian Osborne discusses the nearly 70,000 Ukrainians who immigrated to Canada during the period 1919-39 from Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The CNR and CPR Colonization departments were entrusted with executing the government's limited plan of encouraging agricultural immigration to vacant homesteads on the northern edge of the prairies. Immigrants were scrutinized according to their suitability for assimilation, absorption, and compatibility with the Canadian polity. Although Ukrainians were usually seen as "unsuited" or "non-preferred" immigrants, the growing demand for agricultural labour and the failure of "preferred" immigrants to come forward made room for them to enter the country. As a result, in the period 1925-30 Ukrainians constituted the largest national group admitted into Canada. Canada's interwar immigration policies were guided by expediency and economic, social and political concerns which in turn reflected a growing interest in a planned society and social engineering. Osborne notes a certain irony in the fact that the descendants of those Ukrainians whose entry into Canada was opposed today find themselves part of a Canadian establishment guarding against the entry of new "strangers within our gates".

Oleh Gerus examines Ukrainian-Canadian organizational life during the inter-war period and traces the institutional origins of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee (UCC) which was founded in 1940. He documents a highly individualistic and factional community's attempts to create a common representative body to convey its views to various levels of government. His contention is that the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League (USRL) formed in 1927 was the most influential precursor to the UCC, and that it made an indelible imprint on the self perception and consolidation of Ukrainian society in Canada.

In contrast to the other main Ukrainian organizations such the Ukrainian National Federation, and Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood the USRL developed a distinct Ukrainian-Canadian ideological position that featured unconditional rejection of the authoritarian and conspiratorial characteristics of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and its Canadian counterparts. The USRL attacked totalitarianism and anti-democratic sentiments in Canada and cultivated contacts with Canadian Anglophones. It held up Governor General Lord Tweedsmuir's invocation to be better Canadians by also being good Ukrainians as an official Canadian endorsement of its philosophy. While affirming support for the Ukrainian liberation struggle the League stressed that Ukrainians in Ukraine and not in Canada must determine the nature of that struggle and of any future Ukrainian political social order. The organization approached European affairs from a Canadian perspective and aimed not to antagonize the Canadian government. In the words of Jaroslav Arsenych: "We are Canadians and Ukrainians inseparably. We face questions that must be answered from both positions — Canadian and Ukrainian — and we must have one answer from both positions".

As other organizations broke the League's hold on the title of nationalist leader the organization declined in prominence and became more exclusively associated with the Orthodox church. Gerus concludes that the League's eventual decline was attributable to its success in fulfilling the Canadian dimension of its agenda.

Mark McGowan explores the struggle to reconcile the Eastern rite Ukrainian Catholic Church in Canada with a Roman Catholic Church structure and the ensuing struggle between French-speaking Catholics who believed in a divine mission to evangelize the West and English-speaking Catholics who envisioned a "loyal, imperialist, and anglophone Catholic Canada". In these circumstances attempts by Ukrainians to reconstruct and practise their unique religion were fraught with difficulties. Lacking clergy, hampered by Vatican restrictions, and the object of the competing national visions of French and English-Speaking Roman Catholics, Ukrainian Catholics were nevertheless able to survive as a separate entity. Subject to Latin control from 1891 to 1912, they struggled for autonomy from 1912 to 1929 before stabilizing and expanding their church in the period up to 1948 when they received regional exarchates. In the end neither the anglophones nor the francophones succeeded in their assimilatory plans, and the struggle of Ukrainian Catholics for autonomy inadvertently produced a vibrant pluralism in the Canadian Catholic church.

A better understanding of the role of women within Ukrainian-Canadian history is the aim of Frances Swyrupa's article. Not only has a serious examination of their role been neglected, but the new literature on women's experience in the Canadian West has also subordinated ethnicity in
which integrates extensive primary research and a systematic reading of the Ukrainian immigrant press with the growing body of scholarship on Canadian labour, urban and immigration history. The volume includes an excellent series of maps, tables, illustrations and photographs. Despite these scholarly virtues, the publishers suggest the volume is not intended primarily for students and specialists in Canadian and Ukrainian history. Instead they indicate it is intended to reach the general public and “the descendants of the first wave of peasant immigrants who often are fiercely proud of their Ukrainian cultural heritage in Canada but understand it poorly or not at all — mired as it so frequently is in a maze of partisan history.”

The first major theme of the study is that Old World cultural baggage had a significant effect on the way the community evolved in Canada. The impact of the Ukrainian national movement, which was penetrating the villages of eastern Galicia and northern Bukovyna during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, shaped the world view of many of the young immigrants who became leaders in Canada. Popular village institutions were replicated or adapted, and secular and radical precepts carried into the Canadian urban and rural frontiers. The second major theme of the study concentrates on social differentiation and the emergence of class divisions among Ukrainian immigrants in Canada. While a majority of the first wave of Ukrainians arriving in Canada were prairie homesteaders, tens of thousands became frontier labourers and urban workers attracted to an expanding industrial and transportation infrastructure in all regions of Canada from Cape Breton to Vancouver Island. Another emerging group with growing influence were small scale entrepreneurs, teachers and professionals. It was the divergent experiences, interests and aspirations of these socio-economic groups that gave expression to competing ideologies and institutions during the early settlement period.

Martynowych describes the impact of Protestantism, nationalism and socialism on Ukrainian leaders and organizations. It is sometimes hard to remember the effort put into converting Ukrainians to Protestantism in the period up to World War I, but by the end of the war nationalism and socialism claimed more converts. Martynowych suggests that the most successful early nationalist groups became closely connected to the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church. The church attracted relatively affluent, upwardly mobile professionals, businessmen and farmers — in large measure because of its promotion of goals like Ukrainian nationalism, solidarity and economic self-reliance. The emergence of a radical socialist, even pro-communist, Ukrainian Labour (-Farmer) Temple Association as a competitor to the more conservative nationalists reflected an increasing socio-economic differentiation and political polarization within the Ukrainian community. A distinctly unaffluent urban and frontier proletariat found little common religious or political ground with their wealthier compatriots. Their particular work experiences, living conditions, and social expectations led them to establish a different sort of organization which would meet.
both their cultural and socio-economic needs.

For all Martynowych's rich insight into the Nationalist/Orthodox and ULFTA camps, and of social conditions among Ukrainian rural settlers, urban workers, and frontier labourers, his characterization of Ukrainian Catholicism is less successful. He does mention that Catholic parishes were usually the first and often only rural institutions prior to 1914, but readers get little sense of the diversity and vigour of this community and the various currents within it that closely resembled the activities of the nationalists and intelligentsia. Martynowych's characterization of this community as one whose "staunchest adherents were pious, aging, often illiterate or semiliterate rural settlers and urban labourers, tied to it by habit and centuries of tradition" is unfortunate in what it omits. The church had its own intelligentsia and a share of ambitious, self confident members of a middle class who did not ultimately declare war against their church. To term the Catholics as "not entirely lacking in National consciousness" understates the extent to which the establishment of a separate Ukrainian Catholic episcopate was as much a statement of Ukrainian "nationalism" as was the rise of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada.

Martynowych does, however, take on some of the more persistent myths of Ukrainian-Canadian historiography, particularly bowdlerized versions of the pioneer epic. His graphic descriptions of the social and cultural life experienced within rural, frontier and urban settings offers a disturbing, yet insightful, glimpse into just how disruptive the experience of immigration could be. Traditional beliefs and behaviour patterns often gave way to unbridled fatalism, superstition, alcoholism, and violence that alarmed representatives of the host society and deeply worried Ukrainian leaders themselves and encouraged various schemes to uplift and enlighten the new immigrants. Unfortunately this kind of revisionism can also become little more than a litany of bizarre and cruel incidents with little sense of context or meaning. The play given to the settlers' "insatiable appetite for litigation", and an unqualified picture of settlers drinking "without end and without measure" or assaults at "any number of weddings" contrasts to a rather muted assessment of the community's first tenuous steps into the world of commerce. That there were 85 Ukrainian merchants/proprietors in Winnipeg or that Ukrainians owned over 20% of the grocery stores in North Winnipeg by 1921 were not insignificant trends in a community which had been bound to the soil for centuries.

Overall Martynowych's emphasis on social differentiation and organizational competition tends to produce a picture of a deeply divided community. Only rarely does Martynowych focus on the areas of convergence within the Ukrainian community's competing groups. What he does offer, however, are fascinating glimpses of the community's interaction with other groups within the Canadian mosaic. Here we find not only the host Anglo-Celtic and French communities but also the Austro-Hungarian Volksdeutsche who showed the way to Canada, the Finns with whom they shared the industrial frontier and especially the Jewish community with whom they often shared commercial dealings and urban neighbourhoods.

Ukrainians in Canada provides a compelling picture of the initial period of Ukrainian settlement and community development in Canada. It will surely become one of the standard works against which future examinations of the Ukrainian community will be measured, and it has much to say to scholars interested in the political, economic and, above all, social history of immigration.

In reviewing three distinctive books that cover such a variety of topics, it is hard to keep reminding oneself that although much has been done in the area of Ukrainian-Canadian history, as much or more remains to be done. For example, there continues to be a dearth of good, in depth case studies of rural, urban and frontier communities. Although quite common in other areas of Canadian historiography, there are very few biographies of community leaders that aspire to more than hagiography. No serious effort has been made to identify the sporadic arrivals which preceded the first wave of immigration. Nor are there serious studies of those who settled outside of the main block settlements or those who chose not to align themselves with the dominant religious and political organizations. The question of internal migration within Canada and between Canada and the United States remains to be examined in greater detail. In a country which defines itself within a multicultural framework, it is surprising how little has been written about the interaction between Ukrainians and other Canadian minorities: with the Celts of Cape Breton Island, with the Icelanders of Manitoba's Interlake, with the Austro-Hungarian Germans whom they followed to Canada, with the Native peoples with whom they shared the northern fringes of the aspen parklands, or with the Black American settlers who settled with Ukrainian neighbours in Alberta's Athabasca and Wildwood districts.

For most Ukrainians in Canada this country is the only one they have ever known and their ethnic identity has been forged almost exclusively within the Canadian context. Canada is at the same time the Old Country and the New Country. Louis Hartz notwithstanding, there is very little old country baggage remaining, as the local history of Rycroft/Spirit River in Alberta illustrates. This intriguing book presents Ukrainian immigration sagas from the "Old Country": in this case Gardenton, Manitoba rather than Bukovyna. This seems particularly apt in the centennial year of Ukrainian life in Canada and very much an illustration of a community inseparably Canadian and Ukrainian.

Peter Melnycky
Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism
Edmonton