by Michael Buryk

The old cemetery in Siemuszowa

It was very late in the afternoon when we arrived at the old cemetery in Siemuszowa. The sun was beginning to cast long shadows all around the lush green hills surrounding the small, quiet village. It was not my first time in Poland, but it was my first visit to my ancestral home. My cousin Volodya Cherepanyak and his 85-year-old Aunt Katarzyna Tymczak-Cherepaniak maneuvered slowly and carefully through the thick grass that was growing taller by the day. I set off on my own in a slightly different direction to capture images of as many headstones as I could with my digital camera.

This cemetery looked nothing like the one in Lwewlyn, Pa., near Minersville where my Baba Julia and Gigi Mike were buried. There the headstones were crowed together and the gravesites showed no evidence of my great grandmother, Maria Gburyk, was actually that of the wife of my great-great-uncle Joseph Gburyk. I was later told that my great-grandfather Andrej was to be found anywhere. I did later determine that the headstone of Tekla Buryk was actually that of the wife of my great-great-uncle Joseph Gburyk. I made a mental note then to dig up information about whoever was responsible for bringing the old cemetery in Siemuszowa back to life. And so this spring 2011 I tried to see what was happening there.

As she was cutting through the thick brush, Dr. Bryla became upset by the condition of the cemetery. At first Dr. Bryla wasn’t sure she could spread the information among her friends, people that you know? Or, of course, you can go for these work camps yourself. Work camps take place in the Polish mountains, in a very picturesque area, and concern renovating old cemeteries (with the help of professional stone-workers). The detailed description of the work camps is below.

I followed up with a brief correspondence to the e-mail address listed, but did not find much. The person to whom I was writing spoke limited English and my Polish was non-existent then. But, I looked forward to seeing the results of this restoration effort.

A few years back, I had seen some photos of the old cemetery taken by my cousin Maria Cherepaniak-Walczak on a visit there. It looked impassable and completely overgrown with wild vegetation and many unpruned trees.

So, when I finally arrived at the old cemetery late on a Saturday afternoon in May 2009, I was pleasantly surprised to see that the grounds were walkable and many of the headstones were easy to read, although many were still indistinguishable, with the stone inscriptions faded from many years of exposure to the elements. The oldest remaining headstones showed inscriptions from the early part of the 20th century for village residents who were born as far back as 1836. And I did find a few of my own family: Czerpaniak, Hlib, Szwajlyk, Charowsky. But there were no Gburyk headstones to be found. I was later told that my great-great-grandmother Maria Gburyk, was buried with Rozalia Hlib, who was her daughter Katarzyna’s mother-in-law. But, no evidence of my great-grandfather Andrej was to be found anywhere. Dr. Bryla, a Ukrainian Lemko, is a professor at the Krakow University of Technology Institute of Economics, Philosophy and Sociology, where she works full time. But, she maintains a residence in Zagorz and Zelonka. Her mother, a member of the Bindus family, was from the small hamlet of Luski near Tarnawa Wolska, but currently resides in Siemuszowa. Her father was from the village of Wolica near Bukowsko, which is south of Sanok.

Dr. Bryla became interested in finding her roots in the Trawara valley area. She began by contacting Walter Maleimovich, the founder and owner of the lemko.org website. Mr. Maleimovich knew a man from Trawara Wolska, Walter Zelwik, Mr. Zelwik was interested in doing something about the ruined condition of the Greek-Catholic cemetery in his own town. At first Dr. Bryla wasn’t sure she could undertake such a project, but eventually decided to get involved. During the summer of 2008, she used her vacation time and joined with some of her family and Mr. Zelwik’s relatives in an effort to clean up this cemetery.

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New life for old... (Continued from page 11)
tions she witnessed. Why were the Greek- Catholic cemeteries allowed to fall into such a state of decay? She knew then that she wanted to preserve these cemeteries and it would take more than an individual community. It would require an effort of local vol-
unteers and a few extra zloty to do this.
The next year she formed SDMK as a non-profit in Poland. Zygmunt Mordzejewski, a stonemason who was also very active in efforts to restore Lemko cemeteries as early as 1986 and had formed the Magurycz Association in 2008, became involved in the early preservation work. He also offered advice on how to obtain outside funding.
During the summer of 2005, SDMK began its formal work in the Tyrawa Woloska gmina (local community). Assisting this effort were several organizations, local authorities and volunteers. Also involved was Dr. Bryla’s older brother Peter – a mechanic, builder, handyman and a self-taught mason.
In 2007, after receiving some additional funding, four cemeteries were restored in the Tyrawa Woloska area, including the Greek-Catholic and Jewish ones, as well as the Greek-Catholic cemeteries in Kresow and Rozpuc. In 2008, restoration work took place in the cemeteries of Siemianowa, Holacikow and Rakow. In 2009, there was renovation of historic and forgotten graves near the church of St. Nicholas in Tyrawa Woloska and the local Roman Catholic parish cemetery.
Further renovations also took place in parallel in the foothills of Bukowsko (Pogórze Bukowskie) region south of Sanok near the Bieszczady Mountains in the vicini-
ty of Roztocze.
And what has been the reaction of the local inhabitants and the authorities to the various restoration and inventory projects? Dr. Bryla says the authorities responded favorably and granted permission for her group to set up the work camps. Their coop-
eration was crucial since the land of many of the old cemeteries actually belongs to the Catholic parish which allows a Ukrainian Baptist Church (now used by a Roman Catholic parish which allows a Ukrainian Orthodox service to take place once a month to accommodate the local community).
Restoration of the old cemetery would include clearing some brush and tree overgrowth, as well as stonework and ironwork. Dr. Bryla’s brother Peter is in charge of all restoration activity. She is just beginning to secure funding for this project and wel-
comes any donations and new sponsors.
If you would like to learn more about SDMK and their very important work of preserving cemeteries in the Lemko region of Poland, you can find out more here: http://dmt-woloska.org/2007/yotepet/.
Dr. Bryla can be reached directly at: Stowarzyszenie Dziedzictwo Mniejszosci Poloniowych Karpacz, ul. Filtrowa 19, 31-540 Zagierz; teleph one, 013 46 22 670; e-mail, mniejnosci@karpacz@den.pl.
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Yara Arts Group... (Continued from page 10)
America Singing" by Oksana Lutsyshyna and "Sandman’s Monolog" by Kateryna Babkina.
Her past sponsors have included the Foundation and various churches and private individuals, but she is always searching for new sources of funding.
Unfortunately, money to rescue old Ukrainian (e.g., Lemko, Romanian) cemeteries or for other minorities in Poland is not easy to find.
For 2012-2013, the group is considering a restoration project for the old Greek- Catholic cemetery in Tyrawa Solna (the vil-

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