



Plonna cemetery: Joan Klim headstone before restoration, 2009.



Siemuszowa old cemetery: Tekla Buryk headstone before restoration, 2008.

New life for old cemeteries in the Lemko region of Poland



Plonna cemetery: Joan Klim headstone restored, 2009.



Siemuszowa old cemetery: Tekla Buryk restored headstone, 2008.



Przybyszow cemetery: Jurko Prelka headstone before restoration, 2011.



Przybyszow cemetery: Jurko Prelka headstone restored, 2011.

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-Czerepaniak 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 Llewellyn, Pa., near Minersville where my Baba Julia and Gigi Mike were buried. There the headstones were crowded together and the gravesites showed traces of regular visits by family to care for them. Here at the old cemetery in Siemuszowa there were few personal touches like flowers or candles, and the headstones were randomly spaced with a lot of room in between. Probably other headstones crumbled long ago to leave

Mike Buryk is a Ukrainian American writer whose research focuses on Lemko and Ukrainian genealogy and the history of Ukrainians in the United States. Readers may contact him at michael.buryk@verizon.net. His website is: http://www.buryk.com/our_patch/. He extends special thanks to Ewa Bryla for being interviewed for this article, to Ewa Charowska for assisting with the Polish translation and to Volodya Cherepanyak for his technical assistance during the phone interview.

these open spaces.

Down the hill, right next to the old wooden (formerly) Greek-Catholic Church of the Transfiguration of Our Lord was the new cemetery, which was well-kept and full of fresh flowers and burning memorial candles. This church is now a Polish Catholic parish and its deceased members are buried nearby. Along with them were interred a few of the former Ukrainian residents.

A year before my visit here, I became very excited in the spring of 2008 when I saw this notice posted by Viktoriya Pryadko in a PDF on the Internet.

"Hello, dear friends!

"I am looking for volunteers for my two work camps: in Holuczko and Siemuszowa. They are starting very soon, but I don't have enough people willing to go there...Could you spread the information about them among your 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 out 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 Czerepaniak-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 indecipherable, with the stone inscriptions fatigued 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: Czerepaniak, Hlib, Szwejlyk, Charowski.

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. I did later determine that the headstone of a 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 my usual Internet research tactics to uncover a trail that would lead back to the restorers. Completely by chance, I found an e-mail address for Ms. Pryadko who had posted the original PDF about restoration work camps in Siemuszowa.

Viktoriya, a Ukrainian Lemko, was one of the key volunteers in 2008 who helped to organize the other volunteers for the work camps. After some correspondence back and forth, she pointed me to Ewa Bryla, the founder of the Minority Association of Carpathian Heritage (SDMK is its abbreviation in Polish) based in Zagorze, Poland.

Dr. Ewa Bryla's preservation work

In the past, there were some 1,500 Lemko cemeteries in the hills, mountains and valleys of southeastern Poland. The

ravages of Akcja Wisla in 1947 completely destroyed some, while others were left to slowly fade and eventually resemble the countryside from which they were first carved.

Without the local original parishioners and their descendants to maintain the grounds and repair the crumbling headstones and ironwork, many of the old cemeteries became like the one in Siemuszowa: scattered ruins of a deliberately forgotten past.

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 Zagorze near Sanok. Her mother, a member of the Bindas family, was from the small hamlet of Laski near Tyrawa Woloska not far from 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 Tyrawa valley area. She began by contacting Walter Maksimovich, the founder and owner of the lemko.org website. Mr. Maksimovich knew a man from Tyrawa Woloska, Walter Zelwak. Mr. Zelwak was interested in doing something about the ruined conditioned 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 2004, she used her vacation time and joined with some of her family and Mr. Zelwak's relatives in an effort to clean up this cemetery.

As she was cutting through the thick brush, Dr. Bryla became upset by the condi-

(Continued on page 14)

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 a couple of local volunteers and a few extra zloty to do this.

The next year she formed SDMK as a non-profit in Poland. Szymon Modrzejewski, 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 Krecow and Rozpucie. In 2008, restoration work took place in the cemeteries of Siemuszowa, Holuczkow and Rakowa. In 2009, there was also 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 (Pogorze Bukowskie) region south of Sanok – the village of Plonna in the municipality of Bukowsko, and in the Bieszczady Mountains the village of Polyana in the municipality of Czarna. In Plonna, three cemeteries were renovated: near the old Greek-Catholic

church parish and the old Roman Catholic church square. In addition to repairing the Plonna Greek-Catholic cemetery, renovation was started of the destroyed stone church in which the Communists had located storage for the nearby PGR state farm.

In 2010 SDMK worked on cemeteries in the vicinity of the Tyrawa Woloska community in the villages of Stankowa and Paszowa. In the meantime, other renovations took place in the cemeteries of the villages Paniszczow and Izby near Uscie Gorlice and Wola Sokolowa. Also, individual graves were restored in the villages of Dewiatyr and Nowe Selo in Lubaczow county near the South Roztocze landscape park.

In 2011 SDMK turned its efforts to Bukowsko and the villages of Karlikow, Przybyszow and Zagorz, where the headquarters of the association was established. While restoring cemeteries, SDMK also conducted workshops on the history of the area and its multicultural past, which had evolved there over many hundreds of years before the tragedy of Akcja Wisla.

Another activity of the association is taking inventory of ruined churches in cooperation with students at the Faculty of Architecture University of Technology in Krakow. As of today, the churches were inventoried in 20 villages – from the Lower Beskid Mountains, the Slonne Mountains and near the Bieszczady Mountains in the vicinity 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 cooperation was crucial since the land of many of the old cemeteries actually belongs to the gmina.

The villagers, who were naturally reluctant at first and cool to outsiders coming into their communities and uncovering and

preserving some very painful memories, eventually became neutral and ultimately friendly.

And what's next?

So where does SDMK go from here? Dr. Bryla points out that funding for her efforts is very much on a project-by-project basis. Her past sponsors have included the Foundation Bieszczadzka, the Stefan Batory Foundation, the Polish-American Freedom 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, Boyko) 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 village next to Siemuszowa), which dates back some 200 years. The newer cemetery is well-maintained and sits next to St. John the

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 stone and ironwork. Dr. Bryla's brother Peter now is in charge of all restoration activity. She is just beginning to secure funding for this project and welcomes 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://dmk.witryna.org/index.php?wew=wstep>.

Dr. Bryla can be reached directly at: Stowarzyszenie Dziedzictwo Mniejszosci Karpackich, ul. Filtrowa 19, 38-540 Zagorz; telephone, 013 46 22 670; e-mail, mniejszosci_karpackie@tlen.pl.

Copyright 2012 by Michael J. Buryk. All rights reserved.

Yara Arts Group...

(Continued from page 10)

America Singing" by Oksana Lutsyshyna and "Sandman's Monolog" by Kateryna Babkina.

Debutante Hour must be seen to be appreciated. Featuring Susan Hwang, Mia Pixley and Marusia Sonevytsky, this group's snappy stage banter is so natural that it is hard to realize that it is all improvised on the spot. The trio performed "Your World View Gets Me Down," "Parking Mojo" about the travails of finding a parking space in the "Velyke Yabluko," (Big Apple), "I'm So Glad You Were Born" and "The Rain Fell Like Kisses."

They ended with "Ya Ne Ta" – their version of "Ya Ne Toi" by the group Piatnytsia from Kharkiv, in which they cleverly changed the gender of the singer. The audience demanded an encore, which they did with "Verkhovyno." This version was not the sweet and cloying one that is so often performed; it was three women singing passionately about the mountains, forests and streams.

Olesia Lew, the cuisine chef at Veselka Bowery, presented the post-concert reception. Starting with traditional Ukrainian foods and ingredients, she translated them into unique works of cuisine recognizable to the palate and presented in a refreshing manner. Among the tasty temptations were four different types of "pyrizhky" wrapped

in delicate dough, "kanapky," the best cheesecake ever, and a variety of dessert cookies that were, dare I say it, better than Baba's.

Accompanying the reception were Francois Nnang of Cameroon on balifon and David Alain Jensen on saxophone. Their lively playing, which included show tunes and traditional West African music, drew an appreciative audience. When they finished, members of Hilka spontaneously began singing some of the village songs that they knew they weren't able to perform. Ms. Zahaykevych, as well as audience members, joined in.

What followed was the "treat" of the evening – almost an hour of village singing performed as in the village, with everyone relaxed, just sitting around, singing songs to be sung for oneself, joking over missed lyrics. What a glorious ending to the wonderful evening.

Sunday, the closing day of the festival, saw the presentation of "Music in the Wood" by Watoku Ueno. This was a shadow puppet show for children. However, its beauty and intricacy were enjoyed by audience members of all ages. Performed in English, the presentation featured original Japanese shadow puppets in a story about beautiful music that emerges from inside wood. One often imagines that shadow puppet shows would be in black and white; through the use of translucent colored papers, Mr. Ueno presented this show in color.



UKRAINIAN NATIONAL
FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

IS HONORED
TO INFORM ITS MEMBERS THAT THE

46th ANNUAL MEETING

will be held on

SUNDAY, APRIL 1, 2012,
AT 2:00 PM

in the

UKRAINIAN NATIONAL HOME,
142 SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10003

The Membership is expected to elect one member of the Board of Directors due to expiration of the term of Mr. Walter Drobenko, Esq.

Registration will begin at 1:00 pm.
To register, members will be asked to present
their membership books.

ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ ОБОРОНИ ЛЕМКІВЩИНИ В АМЕРИЦІ

та

ФУНДАЦІЯ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ЛЕМКІВЩИНИ

запрошують українську громаду на презентацію нового видання,
присвяченого 65-ій річниці акції «Вісла»

«ZAKERZONIA

Ethnic Cleansing of
the Ukrainian Minority in Poland
1944-1947»

в неділю, 25-го березня 2012 року, о годині 2-ій по пол.
в Українському Американському Культурному Центрі Нью Джерсі
60 North Jefferson Road, Whippany, NJ

В програмі

візьме участь головний редактор видання, відомий історик
проф. Тарас Гунчак

Запрошуємо!!!