

Siemuszowa: Six Hundred Years of History

By Mike Buryk

Siemuszowa (pronounced Sheh-mu-show-wa) has seen several masters over the course of its six-hundred-plus-year history. Located today in the Sanok (in Ukrainian, Sianik) region of southeastern Poland in the foothills of the fabled Carpathian mountains ("Karpati"), the majority of its original settlers were known as "Rusyn", "Rusnaky", "Ruthenians" and "Lemkos" (Lemkowie). They were Eastern Orthodox and later (after 1596) many became Greek Catholics whose primary language was closely related to Ukrainian. The region itself is referred to as the "Sanok lands" (the San River runs throughout the area) in original Polish civil documents from the 15th century, or "Lemkovyna" ("Lemkivshchyna") by Ukrainians and Carpatho-Rusyns. Siemuszowa is the ancestral village of Mikhail Buryk (Gburyk) and his wife Julia Czerepaniak.

Early History of Sanok region

Before the 9th century AD, the lands around Sanok were sparsely settled by various Slavic tribes. There is some archaeological evidence that there were people living in this area during the period of the Roman Empire and possibly even earlier, but no written records exist which describe them. In the 8th century AD at the beginning of recorded history in Europe, the Slavs gradually began to break up into three distinct groups: West, East and South Slavs. The Poles belong to the West Slavic group and the Ukrainians are part of the East Slavs. The Poles and the Ukrainians (or their ancestors in Kievan-Rus -- its Latin name is "Ruthenia") both laid claim to the Sanok lands at various times and the non-Slavic Hungarians south of the Carpathians did so as well.

In the late 10th century, Kievan-Rus finally secured the Sanok lands for itself and their inhabitants accepted Eastern Orthodox Christianity while the Poles in the West became Roman Catholic. This period left an indelible mark on the culture, social institutions and spirituality of these people and their Ruthenian character would both distinguish them and serve as an ongoing source of friction with their Polish neighbors who wanted to expand further east out of their traditional homeland. The region remained with Kievan-Rus until the middle of the 14th century when that state gradually collapsed from internal infighting and the repeated attacks of the Mongol horde from the East.

Beginning of Siemuszowa and village life

The exact date of the founding of Siemuszowa is not known. Original Polish records of the Sanok lands from the 15th century mention the village as early as 1424. It is possible that Siemuszowa existed earlier since several other villages in the area (such as nearby Tyrawa Solna) were already thriving in the 14th century. The lords of the village in the early 15th century were Spithko ("Spithcone of Semussowa") and John ("Iohannes of Semussowa"), who, apparently, were members of the local Ruthenian nobility. According to existing records, Siemuszowa developed an important relationship with the more northerly village of Dobra ("Dobra Szlachecka"), which itself received special recognition from the Polish King Wladyslaw Jagiello for the military service of its Ruthenian inhabitants who were granted the status of nobility in the Polish Kingdom in 1402 AD.

Siemuszowa and the surrounding villages of the Sanok lands retained their unique "Ruthenian" character throughout the period of Polish rule which ended in 1773-1795 with the partition of the Polish Kingdom between Prussia, Austria and Russia. Although there was a Ruthenian nobility who actively participated in the social, political and economic life of the region, the majority of local inhabitants were peasant farmers.

Many of the peasants were originally invited into newly formed villages in the 14th and 15th centuries by the village owner or local administrator of the Crown to work the lands in return for a home and the right to grow food for their own families. In the 15th century, the service of serf-tenants for the local lord might only amount to 20 days per year. By the 1600's, the requirement of "weekly service" was introduced and each peasant family had to give 3-4 days of labor weekly to the lord. By the 18th century, the father and usually the oldest male member of each peasant-tenant family in a village had to work all week for the lord, while the wife and children were left to raise food for the families' consumption. Serfdom took a heavy toll on the lives of the Ruthenian peasants.

Regarding religion, many of the Ruthenians who lived in this region accepted the Greek Catholic/"Uniate" faith in the 17th century under a compromise reached between the Roman Catholic Church and some of the Eastern Orthodox Ruthenian bishops. This allowed the people to retain their Eastern Orthodox liturgy and customs while paying allegiance to the Roman Catholic Pope. Siemuszowa was an independent Greek Catholic parish until 1813 when it became a "filial" to the larger parish in Tyrawa Solna. Its wooden church ("tserkva", or Greek Catholic church) was

"Epiphany of Our Lord" (built in 1841) and it was renovated in 1932 replacing the older church. It still exists today and is now used by Poles as a "kosciol" (Roman Catholic Church).

The Austrian Empire

In 1772, Siemuszowa and the Sanok lands with all of "Red Ruthenia" passed into the hands of the Austrian Empire and became known as the province of Galicia (or "Halychyna" which was the ancient name for this area). The Austrian Cadastral (census/property) Records of 1787 clearly indicate that the ancestors of Mikhal Gburyk (Buryk) and his wife Julia Czerepaniak were among the inhabitants of the village. There were a total of 31 Lemko families in this village at the time with one Gburyk and one Czerepaniak family listed. Other Lemko families from the village who intermarried to form the lineage of Gburyk/Czerepaniak were Wojnarowski, Gbura and Hirniak (Horniak).

The Austrian Government required that local parishes begin keeping birth, marriage and death records in the "Metryka" registers. These records are written in Latin, Polish and occasionally Ukrainian/Ruthenian and are extremely valuable as a source of local information where they are available. The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) has microfilmed some of the Greek Catholic parish registers from the Sanok area, but unfortunately the village of Siemuszowa has not been filmed although the records do exist. All inquiries about Siemuszowa must be made either through the Polish Consulate in New York City (where each request for a single piece of information such as the names of a person's parents costs \$35), or by corresponding directly with the civil archives which are located now in Tyrawa Woloska. Response is slow and time consuming.

In 1785, the village lands of Siemuszowa consisted of 10.09 sq. km (6.05 sq. miles). There were 260 Greek Catholics (Rusyny) (77%), 68 Roman

Catholics (Poles) (20%) and 10 Jews (3%). The Greek Catholic population continued to grow into the 20th century despite the fact that some of the inhabitants (like Mikhal Gburyk and Julia Czerepaniak) emigrated to North America. In Lemkivshchyna as a whole about 10% of the Greek Catholic population left to cross the "great mud puddle" to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

The exact number of emigrants from Siemuszowa and the Sanok lands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries is not known. By 1921, there were 728 Greek Catholics (81%) in Siemuszowa out of a total population of 892. The number of Poles (140) as a percentage of the population dropped (16%) while the Jews remained constant 31 (3%). It should be noted in this census that the 31 people listed as having the Jewish faith actually were included among the Polish nationals (171) and were not put into a separate "Jewish" nationality category. There were 165 dwellings listed in the village in the 1921 census plus one manor house with 13 people associated with it.

World Wars I and II

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 led to more upheaval for Siemuszowa and the Sanok lands. Some of the fighting actually took place in the area of the Carpathian Mountains. One result of the war was the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the revival of an independent Polish state which again included Red Ruthenia and the Sanok lands.

The period between the end of World War I and World War II saw greatly increased tensions between Poles and Ukrainians and those residents of Siemuszowa who closely identified themselves with the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians had unsuccessfully attempted to secure an independent state for themselves between 1918 and 1920 and the Western Ukrainians, in particular, could not accept renewed Polish rule.

It was during this time that "Ukraine" and "Ukrainian" became the commonly accepted terms for "Ruthenia" and "Ruthenian". However, some of the Carpathian Rusyns continued to view themselves as a distinct nation -- the Carpatho-Rusyns. The Greek Catholic residents of Siemuszowa considered themselves Ukrainians.

In 1939, Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler invaded Poland. It was agreed between Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, and Hitler that Galicia would be divided with the eastern part added to the Ukrainian

Soviet Socialist Republic and the western part remaining in Poland. Siemuszowa and the Sanok lands remained in Poland under the administration of Nazi authorities in Sanok.

"Operation Vistula" and the final solution During the course of the war, a group of Ukrainian guerrilla fighters was formed which was known as the "Ukrainian Insurgent Army" (or "UPA"). UPA was determined to fight for an independent Ukrainian state against all sides, whether Soviet, Russian, Nazi or Polish. Much of their activity took place in the Carpathian Mountains and the Ukrainians in Lemkivshchyna found themselves in the middle of a very difficult situation. Although many were sympathetic to the idea of a free, independent Ukraine, they did not necessarily agree with a military solution to secure it.

Once the war was over, both the new Polish Communist Government and Stalin agreed that the "Ukrainian problem" must be solved once and for all. Approximately 480,000 Ukrainians in Poland were "invited" to migrate to the Ukrainian SSR between 1944 and 1946 and many settled around Lviv (the capital of Western Ukraine) and Ternopil. Mikhail Czerepaniak, the oldest brother of Julia Czerepaniak of Siemuszowa, and his family was among this group.

In the Spring of 1947, "Operation Vistula" took place. It was the forced deportation of 150,000 Lemkos and Ukrainians to the far western and northern lands of Poland which had been secured from the Germans during World War II. Zofia (Sophia) Czerepaniak, an older sister of Julia Czerepaniak, left Siemuszowa with her family under this military action never to return again to her native village. Other members of the Czerepaniak family were also scattered all over Poland by Operation Vistula. Almost nothing is known about what happened to the Gburyk (Buryk) family at this time.

The Czerepaniak family was torn from the village where its ancestors had lived for hundreds of years. Conditions were very difficult for the deportees since not only were they deprived of all their possessions and land, but they were also labeled as criminals. Some did not survive the cruel ordeal. Permanent damage was done to both the material and spiritual health of the families who were deported in this way and many still have yet to recover to this day. Some families eventually decided to leave Poland forever and made their way abroad.

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