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AN ESSAY ON WHY SOME EAST SLAVS FROM GALICIA AND UPPER HUNGARY BECAME RUSSIANS IN THE USA

[an -e-mail in Spring 2018 about a commemoration regarding the Russian Imperial Family promoted some speculation on this writer's part about where the "Russians" of the USA had come from. This article is essay format because the topic, as this writer approaches it, is based on personal observations over a 60-year period. While there are citations to several major sources, this story is not amenable to classical footnoting]

Introduction

This article deals with one aspect of the 100-year struggle (1848–1947) for control of the former Austrian Crownland of Galicia. The principal contenders for power were the Polonophiles and the Rusophiles (note the single "s").

By the turn of the 19/20th centuries the Rusophiles had divided into Russo-philés (two "s"s). those who supported the idea of a single East Slavic "Rus" family which should be led by the Tsar, and Ukrainophiles who believed that there is a separate East Slavic nationality, that is, separate from the Moscovite-St. Petersburg "Great Russian" nation. In the inter-war period, the Galician district was called Malo-Polska (Little Poland) and there the Russian orientation more or less disappeared.

In general, the Polonophiles had the upper hand from 1867 to 1914, during the so-called "Galician Autonomy" period when Vienna conceded local control

to Kaiser Treu (loyal to the Habsburg Monarchy) Polish nationality landowners. These people tried to impose Polish education and the Polish language as the language of administration.

After the battles of World War One the allied powers awarded control of Galicia to the Second Polish Republic. In the 20-year inter-war period the Ukrainian movement gained the upper hand among East Slavs (see Jaroslaw Moklak, *The Lemko Region in the Second Polish Republic: Political and Interdenominational Issues, 1918–1939*, (Cracow: The Jagiellonian University Press, 2013) for a 164-page analysis of this phenomenon)

As the reader will undoubtedly know, between 1939 and mid 1947 the issue of Ukrainian control versus Polish control of Galicia was decided in favor of Ukraine, the post-war Polish People's Republic got only Przemyśl west to Cracow (including the Lemko Region) while all the rest went to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. To seal this resolution of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict a massive population exchange took place between 1944–1946 with Poles forced west and most East Slavs pushed over the Soviet border to the east.

In 1947 the last East Slavs in post-war Southeast Poland, about 100,000 Ukrainians and 50,000 Lemkos, were forcibly scattered, during the so-called Vistula Action (Akcja Wisła), to the "Regained Territories" in Western and Northern Poland. At the date of this writing there are no known Russophiles noted in Poland in-general or Southeast Poland in-particular. But nothing of the above is unknown to Polish or Ukrainian scholars.

Meanwhile, #1

There is an entirely different history for East Slavs from Southeast Poland (and from the Northern part of the Hungarian Kingdom- today's Slovakia) who immigrated to the USA in the 45-year pre-World War One period, 1870–1914. Hundreds of thousands of East Slavs took to the trains to the German Atlantic ports, Hamburg and Bremen (and other places too). A few immigrants went to Brazil and Argentina- many of whom eventually ended up in the USA too.

These immigrants had not, in the main, yet made any nationality commitment. To be sure they were citizens of Austria or the Hungarian Kingdom but their national orientation was not at all clear. However, they ran head-on into an entrenched English/Irish/German West European culture and they were thrown for a loop. While they might have identified as "Catholics" but they were a different type of Catholic, Greek/ Byzantine rite Catholics (in some census records they are actually listed as "Greeks"). Being Catholic didn't help much since the in-place Americanizing Latin Rite hierarchy, claimed jurisdiction over all Catholics. To the Latin hierarchs, the arrival of "other" Catholics who used a different rite, a different alphabet, a different liturgical language and a different calendar

was bad enough but also along came the wife and kids of the priests. What a scandal and conflicts abounded. One priest Alexis Toth, a widower from the Hungarian Kingdom diocese of Presov, ran afoul of Archbishop John Ireland of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Being a trained canon lawyer Toth knew he was in the right and being insulted to his core he turned/defected to the Russian Orthodox mission in San Francisco.

Meanwhile, #2

In 1794 the Imperial Russian (state) Church began a Holy Synod of St. Petersburg authorized mission to the Aleutian Islands and Alaska. This mission eventually claimed the right to control all Orthodox activity in not only North America but South America too. Based on “we got here first” and “one diocese-one bishop” concept the Russian Church was able to successfully claim supremacy in the Americas until 1917. By the 1860s the Russian Mission was rooted in Sitka, Alaska with tens of thousands of native adherents and several hundred ethnic Russian believers. When Alaska was sold to the USA the bishop’s seat was moved to San Francisco in order to better accommodate the Russian Pacific Naval and merchant fleets.

About the same time as the transfer of the Russian bishopric to San Francisco an Imperial Russian supported Pan-Slavic movement was developing in Europe and a state supported aggressive missionary force was fielded to draw all Slavs, especially East and South Slavs, to the great Leader of All Slavs the Russian Emperor/Tsar. Feelers were extended into Galicia and Northern Hungary just when the great migration began to America. Both the Holy Synod in St. Petersburg and the clergy of the Pacific coast Orthodox bishopric noted the turmoil amongst the East Slavs flowing into American ports on the East Coast. Perhaps these people could be recruited to the Russian cause.

Father Alexis Toth

Rejected by Bishop Ireland in Minneapolis, Fr. Toth took the train to San Francisco and was received with open arms into the Russian Church- note: without re-baptism, re-ordination or any other formalities than a statement of change of jurisdiction, from the Presov bishop to the San Francisco one. Eventually Toth drew, it is reported, by himself alone, some 25,000 Greek Catholic to the Russian Church with the concomitant acceptance of Russian nationality. Once Toth got going the Russian mission started to send in missionary priests and perhaps half of the 500,000 immigrants from the homeland switched over to Russia. That was rather easily done since there was not much difference in belief or activity

and one might not in fact know whether one was in a Greek Catholic or a Russian Orthodox church without careful observation. It should be noted that as far as religious activity was concerned there were some very concrete advantages to switching: the priest might be paid out of missionary funds thus little or no out-of-the-pocket costs for the poor immigrant, the office of the Tsar or some other governmental or quasi-governmental organization might send operating funds or the Russian government itself might fully or partially pay for a church building, plus accoutrements might be supplied out of some missionary fund.

Besides the church/religious advantage to going to Russia there were other very positive societal pluses. Eastern rite Austrian citizens (those from north of the Carpathian crest) could choose to be identified with the “dumb Polaks” with which they found themselves as they immigrated or the dumb “Hunkies”, if they came from south of the Carpathians OR there was the possibility of being “Russian. Based on British English, all East Slavs were “Russians”. Imperial Russia was considered to be a friend of the USA, from the time of the American Revolution in 1776 to the end of 1917. During the Civil War Russian fleets visited San Francisco and New York in apparent support of Abraham Lincoln and the North. Russia sold Alaska to the USA at a good price in 1867 and trade with Russia boomed until the Bolshevik Revolution. The Colt manufacturing company of Hartford Connecticut, sold large amounts of arms to Russia while several major US life insurance companies did business in Russia and five large Russian Reinsurance companies worked out of Hartford and New York City, up to 1917. Thus, wouldn't one want to be identified with one of the planet's great powers with world renowned art and literature and one of the great Christian churches to boot? The problem was hardly any East Slavic immigrants were actually from Imperial Russia, the sole exception were some Slavs who slipped across the eastern border of Austria at Brody to entrain to Europe's east coast to the USA. [In practical fact Imperial Russia encouraged migration for its Jews, who of course did not identify as Russians, so while many did move, they do not fit in this discussion] Could not these Austrian and Hungarian citizens be Russified through religion, by the Orthodox Mission?

Beyond the Aleut and Alaska natives there were very few Russian in North America and most ethnic Russians had left at the sale of the Alaska territory. But due to the friendship between the USA and Russia the missionaries had a free hand. The situation was different in Canada because Great Britain had fought Russia in the Crimean War (1854–1856) and had tried to thwart Russian ambitions in the Balkans and Turkey in the last part of the 19th century- Russia was considered a dangerous rival up to the beginning of the 20th century and the lead up to World War One.

But back to the USA, while there were some attempts by the L'viv, Przemyśl, Uzhgorod and Presov dioceses to rein-in their adherents in emigration,

Imperial Russia was more active. After all the Galician and Hungarian Kingdom migrants were poor peasants and they were practically minded, why not accept missionaries who were paid by someone else and who offered all sorts of assistance and one got the prestige of being Russian too. Lest the reader think what has been said so far is the product of the fevered mind of the writer may your attention be drawn to a 530-page work by Joel Brady:

Transnational Conversions: Greek Catholic Migrants and Russky¹ Orthodox conversion movements in Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Americas (1890–1914) This is a Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pittsburg, 2017 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree.

This work, replete with charts, tables and statistics, deals in detail with the switches, back and forth, of religious jurisdictions between Orthodoxy and Greek Catholic. He indicates that the Oberprocuror (High Supervisor) and the Synod of Russian Orthodox Bishops financed Fr. Toth's activities and others that followed from his initiative. Dr. Brady uses 470 pages of text and 1102 continuous footnotes (another unusual action, most dissertations number footnotes separately chapter by chapter) to cover the topic of the title. He uses eight appendices to buttress his arguments that Imperial Russia used the Orthodox mission to further its political causes.

He notes, early on (page 6), that all the Orthodox activity led to “no discernable change in religious practices”, that wasn't the idea- support of the imperial autocracy and the Tsarist system was the point, getting East Slavs to identify as Russian was the way to get that support.

The Break

The great break in the process of Russification of Galician and Hungarian East Slavs was 1917. Obviously, the Bolsheviks were not about to finance the Russian Orthodox Mission and it shattered into pieces. Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek, Syrian and other Orthodox units formed up their own jurisdictions while the Russian one eventually went over to what today are the: “The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church (the Metropolia), since the 1970s “The Orthodox in America” (OCA); The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR); Patriarchal Parishes of the Moscow Patriarchate (churches still dependent on Moscow through a bishop based in New York City). The so-called “Living

¹ This author is somewhat surprised by the use of the non-standard use of “Russky”, in place of the perfected acceptable and commonly used word “Russian”. The dissertation writer explained that he didn't want to get into arguments about the terms-russkii, russkiy, rus'kyi, rusyn. Ruthenian Russian, rus.

Church”, while attempted in the 1920s in the USA never took root and disappeared in the 1930s. Today there is also a disorganized group of ROCOR parish-
es who dissent from ROCOR officially becoming an autonomous diocese under Moscow, in the 1990s. [There is one other “Russian” jurisdiction, attached to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, which began in the 1930s- The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church- when the Byzantine Greek Catholic bishop Basil Takach attempted to enforce celibacy and to take control of church properties which had been bought and paid for by local parish-
es- but that is another story]

The 21st Century

In the 100-year jump from 1918–2018, despite the fact that many descendants of the East Slavs we have been writing about here have assimilated entirely; left for other churches; have left religion entirely; or have lost any interest in the activities of their ancestors, nonetheless there still exists a remnant of the American Russians. This writer has observed over the years that many became so fixated at being Russian that they excused anything the Communists did because, after all they are “svoy”/ours. Others stood to the side and clung to whatever version of “Russian” religion, culture suited them. A number of these “Russians” still reject the legitimacy of Belarusians, Ukrainians and Carpatho-Rusyns since whatever language those people use are, after all, are but dialects of the great, high Russian literary language. These people accept all Russian (and some Soviet) military leaders, heroes, authors (poetry or prose) and artists- plus the hierarchs of Orthodoxy, its saints and of course, the existence of “Holy Russia”.

As far as a general Russian organization there is a “Congress of Russian Americans” but that appears to be moribund. Specific Russian church organizations do exist while Ukrainians and Carpatho-Rusyns are active across the board.

Contemporary expressions of “Russianism” are thus connected to the Russian Orthodox churches and identification with Russian history.

Churaevka and the Romanovs

The existence of active 21st century adherents of Russian history in the USA was brought to this writer’s attention when in early Spring 2018 he received a forwarded e-mail announcing the commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the birth of the last Tsar Nicholas II and, more or less, the 100th anniversary of his assassination.

But to step back a bit. While training in Russian Studies in the late 1950s and the early 1960s this writer heard of a “Russian Village”, also known as

Churaevka (named after a real or mythical Siberian village- it is not clear) in the South Britain part of the town of Southbury, Connecticut, near the confluence of the Pomperaug and Housatonic rivers but the existence of this village dropped from his view.

In regard to the Emperor Nicholas, during the battles between the “Russian” churches in North America, which one was the “true church”, he dropped out of sight. However, in the 1970s ROCOR raised Nicholas to the rank of martyr for his faith. Only after the collapse of communism in Russia did the internal Russian Orthodox Church also proclaim Nicholas, his family and a few retainers, martyrs, worthy to be venerated.

Now in the 21st century there has been a revival of study of the Imperial Dynasty. St. Vladimir’s OCA Seminary in Yonkers, New York has recently published two books praising the Romanovs and in Colchester, England, beginning in 2016, a semi-annual journal, Gosudar/Sovereign, is being published dedicated to the life and works of Nicholas II.

The idea that power comes from God and He/God gives power to whom He wishes has been revived, thus the last Tsar was a servant of God and he died in that service, for the glory of Russia and that should be acknowledged. The Russian Orthodox Church taught that the Emperor was an appointee of God and to resist the Tsar’s power was to resist God- to fight against God as it were.

Parenthetically, believers in Nicholas’s saintliness cannot believe that fellow Russians killed him, surely this was the dark work of “Jews, Jesuits and Masons”.

But let us return to Churaevka, very, very few Moscovite Russians ever immigrated to the USA but after WW I some of the elite, escaping the Bolsheviks did. The most famous of which were Igor Sikorsky and some of the Tolstoy family, parenthetically the last Prime Minister of Democratic Russia, Alexander Kerensky died in Westchester County New York. But to the point, Ilya Tolstoy and the architect George Grebenshikoff and a few other Russian emigres purchased land in Southbury Connecticut, a place researchable from New York City by auto or train, in 1925 in the hope of establishing a Russian intellectuals’ colony. A place to which the intellectual class could repair in the summer time to recharge their batteries. Even in 2018 one can detect some semblance of this concept. The colony, actually a group of cabins/dachas within a pine wood, very much resembling the writers’ colonies that popped up outside Moscow, still exists today. Individual pieces of land are private property and it is not clear today who (what sort of people) owns what. The center is a small fieldstone chapel not much larger than 14 feet by 14 feet, about 12 feet high with tall narrow windows on three sides and a large door forming the entrance. All topped by a triple barred cross.

When the e-mail arrived announcing the Saturday, March 19 commemoration this writer decided to go.

A few days earlier a powerful wind storm had blown through that area knocking down many, many trees but the road to that chapel and the chapel itself were not affected.

The liturgy at the chapel was served by a ROCOR bishop from New York, the chapel itself is under the protection of a ROCOR church in Stratford, Connecticut. The service itself lasted three hours and appeared to be a reenactment of a 19th century high Russian church service. There was a deep voiced deacon, four priests, and four altar servers – how all 10 could get into the chapel couldn't be understood from the outside what with the altar in the middle. The choir and most of the 100 or so attendees dressed as proper 19th century worshipers, almost all the women wore long shirts and head coverings. The choir sang the service in Church Slavonic beautifully.

Who exactly the congregation was ethnically could not be determined but this writer speculates that at least some of these, indeed, were descendants from the old homeland who closely identified with Imperial Russia and the Romanov dynasty even in the 21st century.

Conclusion

Thus, what is one to make of all this? In the 21st century, nowhere in the old homeland did this writer find anyone who claimed to be a “Russian”, though some such people might very well exist. No, in the 21st century there are those who identify as Ukrainian while others are of the Rusnak, Lemko (Carpatho-Rusyn) persuasion. However, in the USA, and to some extent in the English-speaking parts of Canada (no East Slavs are known to have settled in French Canada) there still exists those who are descendants of immigrants from the Galician and Upper Hungary/ East Slavic areas who still think of themselves as Russian and that their ancient homeland was “Western Russia”.