



### The Rusyn American Press

Northeastern Pennsylvania has been the primary home of most Rusyn immigrant newspapers. The first newspaper for Rusyn immigrants was *Ameryka*, published in Shenandoah from 1886 to 1890. Each fraternal organization had its own newspaper, published first in variants of the Rusyn language, and later in English. The *Amerikansky Rusky Viestnik* (*American Russian Messenger*, later the *Greek Catholic Union Messenger*), the organ of the GCU, began publishing in Scranton in 1892. *Svit/The Light*, the ROCMAS newspaper, was published in Wilkes-Barre starting in 1895. The RBO's *Pravda/The Truth* set up shop in Olyphant in 1906. The *Ljubov* newspaper was published in Mayfield from 1913 to 1957. Any number of these and similar newspapers could be found in typical Rusyn immigrant homes in the region.

### Secular Institutions

The earliest organization with the sole goal of promoting knowledge about Rusyns was the Carpatho-Russian Cultural League, founded in Hazleton in 1923, with 16 branches in northeastern Pennsylvania. There were further attempts at establishing secular organizations to promote Rusyn heritage after World War II. The American Rusin Clubs of Luzerne County was active from the 1940s to the 1970s and had branches in Wilkes-Barre, Kingston, Pittston, Old Forge, Swoyersville, Nanticoke, Glen Lyon, and elsewhere. In Schuylkill County, two similarly-named organizations, ASUR and ARUS, tried to unite Slovaks, pro-Ukrainian Rusyns, pro-Russian Rusyns, and Ukrainians for civic, educational, and charitable purposes. However, these organizations were never completely successful in articulating a unified Carpatho-Rusyn identity that would stand above the religious divisions and the myriad names and orientations that have marked the history of Rusyns in the region.

And so Rusyns in northeastern Pennsylvania today for the most part express their ethnic identity through their member-

ship in Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox parishes, which still have very popular festivals, bazaars, and food sales – especially *pyrohŷ* (pierogies), *holubkŷ* (stuffed cabbages) and *halušky* (potato dumplings or noodles with cabbage). Today, with the popularity of genealogy, travel to the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland, and the wealth of information in English about Rusyn heritage in books and on the Internet, people of Rusyn descent in northeastern Pennsylvania of are rediscovering the riches of their culture and history. National organizations like the Carpatho-Rusyn Society have a strong membership base in the region and among natives of the region now living elsewhere.



*pyrohŷ-making in Jessup, mid-1900s*

Americans of Carpatho-Rusyn descent have contributed much to the rich ethnic mosaic of northeastern Pennsylvania. They continue to make their mark on all aspects of society in the region. Their churches play an important role in the lives of their members of Rusyn descent as well as those of other backgrounds. And the Carpatho-Rusyn Society looks forward to making the rich culture, heritage, and history of Carpatho-Rusyns better known in the region through a NEPA Chapter.

*We welcome you to join us!*



**CARPATHO-RUSYN SOCIETY**

915 DICKSON STREET • MUNHALL, PA 15120-1929

**Text/Layout: Richard D. Custer**

© 2008 Carpatho-Rusyn Society  
www.c-rs.org

# Carpatho-Rusyns

*in Northeastern  
Pennsylvania*



*Carpatho-Rusyn wedding play, Nanticoke, 1930s*

**Carpatho-Rusyns**, also known by various names such as Ruthenians, Carpatho-Russians, Lemkos, "Slavish", or even (inaccurately) as "Russians," are one of the major ethnic groups of northeastern Pennsylvania.

From the time they settled the area's small towns and cities in the late 1870s until the present time, Carpatho-Rusyns have left an indelible mark on the region with their "onion-domed" churches, rich cultural traditions, and devotion to their roots.

**Carpatho-Rusyns** live in the very heart of Europe, along the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains. Their homeland, known as Carpathian Rus', is situated where the borders of Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland meet. Smaller numbers of Rusyns live in Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, and the Czech Republic. In no country do Carpatho-Rusyns have an administratively distinct territory. However, Rusyns are recognized as a distinct people in most of the countries where they live, including the United States.

Carpatho-Rusyns belong to the Slavic branch of Indo-European peoples. Their dialects are classified as East Slavic, but are heavily influenced by neighboring Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian. Unlike their West Slav (Polish and Slovak), Hungarian, and Romanian neighbors, Carpatho-Rusyns use the Cyrillic alphabet.

### Settlement

Carpatho-Rusyns began to settle in the anthracite coal mining districts of northeastern Pennsylvania in the late 1870s. Small towns and burgeoning cities like Shenandoah, Shamokin, Minersville, Mount Carmel, Mahanoy City, McAdoo, Centralia, Nesquehoning, Lansford, Hazleton, Wilkes-Barre, and Scranton were among the first places Rusyn communities started to appear.

In the late 1890s many Rusyns left the coal region to work in the slate and cement industry centered in Catasauqua, Northampton, Palmerton, and Slatington; others immigrated there directly, resulting in a large concentration of Carpatho-Rusyns. The nearby steel mills and factories of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton attracted significant numbers of Rusyns as well.

Rusyns were also attracted by jobs in other industries: the timber industry around Lopez, railroad car factories in Berwick, and railroad repair shops in Sayre. Some Rusyn immigrants, weary of coal mining, established farms around Pleasant Mount, Uniondale, Dundaff, Nicholson, Moscow, and South Canaan.

### Rusyn American "Firsts"

Because Rusyns settled northeastern Pennsylvania earlier and in greater numbers than anywhere else in the U.S., most Rusyn community institutions have their "firsts" in this region. Northeastern Pennsylvania was the site of the first Rusyn church, the first Rusyn fraternal organization, and the first Rusyn newspaper. In some form, all of these institutions still exist today.

### Establishment of Rusyn Churches

The church, be it Byzantine/Greek Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, has traditionally been the heart of the Rusyn community. So it was not long after they first came to the United States that Rusyns would establish their own churches. The first, St. Michael's Greek

Catholic, was built in Shenandoah in 1884. There quickly appeared other Greek Catholic churches in Freeland (1886), Kingston (1887), Wilkes-Barre, Olyphant, and Hazleton (1888), Shamokin (1889), Scranton, Mayfield, Mahanoy City, McAdoo, and Mt. Carmel (1891), Lansford (1892), Old Forge (1893), Alden Station and Sheppton (1894), Glen Lyon and Beaver Meadows (1895), Minersville (1896), and St. Clair and Plymouth (1897).



Because some particular traditions of the Greek Catholic Church, such as a married clergy, were unfamiliar to the already-established Roman Catholic Church in America, conflicts arose between immigrant Greek Catholic clergy and the American Roman Catholic hierarchy. In protest, a pioneer Rusyn priest, Fr. Alexis Toth, joined the Russian Orthodox Church in 1891. When the Greek Catholic Rusyns in Wilkes-Barre invited him in 1893 to serve as their pastor, further conflict ensued, this time within the Rusyn community itself, over church ownership and religious affiliation. The next thirty years would see Greek Catholic parishes join the Orthodox Church (such as Old Forge, Mayfield, and Sheppton), and new Orthodox parishes were established: Scranton (1897), Catasauqua (1899), McAdoo (1901), Olyphant, St. Clair, and Simpson (1904), Mt. Carmel, Jermyn, and Lopez (1907), Berwick and Coaldale (1909), Minersville and Edwardsville (1910), and many others. St. Tikhon's Monastery was also founded in 1905 in South Canaan through the activities of Fr. Toth and with the support of local Rusyns who had joined the Orthodox Church.

This strife resulted in a divided Rusyn American community, and many Rusyns in northeastern Pennsylvania, especially those who had joined the Russian Orthodox Church, came to consider themselves "Russians."



### Rusyn Fraternal Organizations

Rusyns also established "brotherhoods" or burial societies (today known as fraternal organizations) to pay death benefits to the surviving family members of the coal miners who were dying in mine accidents at an alarming rate. Many of the Carpatho-Rusyn fraternal organizations got their start in the anthracite districts. The first, largest, and most influential Rusyn fraternal, the Greek Catholic Union (GCU), was founded in Wilkes-Barre in 1892. The *Rus'kyj Narodnyj Sojuz* (Rusyn National Association) was founded in Shamokin in 1894 with a primarily Carpatho-Rusyn membership and leadership, but by 1914 its orientation had changed to Ukrainian and its name was changed to the Ukrainian National Association.



*Rusyn immigrant family, Scranton, early 1900s*

The Rusyns who were joining the Orthodox Church in the 1890s established a new, pro-Russian and Orthodox fraternal society, the Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society (ROCMAS), in Wilkes-Barre in 1895. The organization's headquarters is still in Wilkes-Barre today.



Another offshoot of the GCU was the Russian Brotherhood Organization (RBO), established in Mahanoy City in 1900, mostly by former leaders of the GCU and the Rusyn National Association; unlike the other organizations, it had both Greek Catholic and Orthodox members, primarily Carpatho-Rusyns.

A much smaller Rusyn fraternal society in the hard coal region, the Russian Orthodox Fraternity "Lubov", was founded in Mayfield in 1912 by members of ROCMAS and RBO to unite Orthodox Rusyn patriots from Galicia. Despite the large numbers of Lemko Rusyns in the region, the Lemko Association was not influential here, although small branches of this organization were started in Olyphant, Hazleton, St. Clair, Marion Heights, Kulpmont, and Mt. Carmel.