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Bukovynian Funeral Customs

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There are many key events or important times which have a major effect on a person's life. One of the events in this life cycle is death. A number of beliefs and/or rituals have arisen surrounding death to help those who remain deal with the separation, since death, no matter what is believed to occur afterward, marks the physical termination of an individual's presence. These rites of passage manifested themselves in many unique ways among the Bukovynian settlers in Canada, who brought them to the new land. This paper then deals with the funeral customs practised by those settlers from Bukovyna living in East-Central Alberta as remembered by one informant who was a member of that community. I have attempted to document these funeral customs while at the same time discover the beliefs associated with them and determine how they have changed with the passing of time.

The informant for this study is John Achtymichuk, a Bukovynian Ukrainian originally from the East-Central Alberta bloc settlement. John was born on a farm near the town of Smoky Lake in 1916 and remembers well the customs and traditions of his family and the other Bukovynian settlers living in the area. The collection took place by means of a taped interview at Mr. Achtymichuk's home in Edmonton. A verbatim transcript of the interview is located at the end of the paper.

I chose Mr. Achtymichuk for the interview because of my personal relationship with him -- he is my mother's cousin --

which I felt would permit me to discover more information than I would have been able with a stranger, and for his general loquacity. Once in the interview, though, John did not seem to volunteer as much information as I expected he would. Whether this was because my expectations were too high or because he was not able to remember everything, I do not know. I believe, however, that it was partly due to his nervousness over the situation, a feeling compounded by the fact that he did not understand my first question asked in relation to the funeral customs. Overall, though, Mr. Achtymichuk was able to remember a good deal of information about the Bukovynian funeral customs practised in his area, but many times was not able to recall or did not know the beliefs associated with those customs.

From Mr. Achtymichuk's description, it seems that Bukovynian funerals had three main sections in them: the activities and rituals in the home before, during, and after the death of an individual; the transporting of the body, generally from the home, to the cemetery; and the actual burial.

Preparations for one's death were begun by the individual years beforehand with the preparing of one's own funeral clothes (the clothes in which one wished to be buried) and rushnyky, special towels which would be given at the funeral as payment to the pallbearers and gravediggers. At the time which John remembers, only the older women carried on this tradition. The younger women and the men did not do this, but instead were buried in the good clothes which would be worn for

special holidays. For the women these clothes were still traditional Ukrainian dress, but for the men these clothes were the store-bought suits common to the rest of Canadian society.

Due to the fact that there were no hospitals in the area, the sick were looked after in the home and that is also where their deaths occurred. When it was evident that a person was dying, he was taken to the 'velyka kimnata' or special room of the usually two-room house, and around him gathered his family and close friends, quietly praying and talking with him. Candles were also lit in the room and one was given to the dying person to hold. Once death occurred, the body was washed and dressed and placed on a bench in the 'velyka kimnata'. This bench would be made up like a bed and would usually, with other benches for people to sit on, be one of the only pieces of furniture left in the room, everything else having been taken outside or placed in the grainary to make room for the numbers of people who would come. The body would lie in the house for usually three days (John believed this was done to allow friends and relatives to come from far away and for the religious significance of Jesus Christ having been in the tomb for three days.) during which people would come to pay their respects. During these three days candles were always burning and there would always be someone sitting with the body. On the third day, the priest would come and everyone would gather for a special lunch ('obid'),

after which the priest would perform the 'parastas' or funeral service. After the 'parastas', the body would be placed in a coffin which had been built during the three day repose and would be made ready for transport to the cemetery.

The body was taken outside and placed on a wagon to be transported to the cemetery (John remembers having been told or having read that in the Old Country the body would always be transported by sled, even in summer, but he said he never saw that done in Canada.). The procession would begin with the body being transported and most of the rest of the people going by foot and carrying candles, icons brought from the church, and 'kolachi' or small ritual loaves which they had been given by the family at the 'obid'. As the procession went along, it would be stopped at each crossroad and roadside shrine, where the priest would perform another prayer service. Mr. Achtymichuk could not remember what this service entailed, except that there was a reading from the Gospel. The funeral procession would continue in this manner, stopping at each crossroads, until it reached the cemetery.

The cemetery itself would be located right near the church or somewhere in the immediate vicinity. John did not feel that there was any significance to the position of the cemetery or the graves in it, except that graves of suicides were separated from the others and sometimes were not even located in the consecrated ground itself. He believed that this was due to the fact that suicide was considered a very great

sin by the Church. At the graveside, the priest would celebrate a short internment service, after which everyone would return to their own homes. One significant fact that John mentioned here was that at every burial there would always be ritual wailers, in his district two older women, who would be invited by the family to come and 'zawodyty' or 'premonyty' (lament) over the deceased. These wailers, who were always women would approach the open coffin, say a small prayer, then bend over so they could look the deceased in the face and wail in a ritual fashion. In their 'zawody' these women would recall the life of the deceased and also mention all that he left behind and how everyone would suffer because of his passing. The effect of these 'zawody', which were always addressed directly to the deceased as if he were still present, was such that everyone would be weeping uncontrollably by the end.

Though the funeral itself would end with the graveside ceremony, after six weeks there would be a memorial service and as well at one year, two years, and sometimes five or ten years after the actual death. At these memorial services, the family and close friends would gather around the grave with the priest, who would perform a short prayer service.

When asked about the beliefs were associated with the various funeral rituals he described, Mr. Achtymichuk was often not able to come up with any. I think this is partly due to the fact that he could not remember them and partly due to the fact that he did not know them in the first place.

From talking with him, it is my opinion that Mr. Achtymichuk has, for lack of a better term, a matter-or-fact view of these rituals, in that he analyzes them in a very practical manner, according to their usefulness. A good example of this is that when asked why there were three days between the death and the burial, he first answered that it was to give relatives time to come from far away, and only when asked if there could be a ritual significance did he speculate that it might be associated with the length of time Jesus spent in the grave. He also repeatedly stressed the amount of work and hardship (both physical and emotional) that preparing for a funeral was on the family and other such 'mundane' things -- the length of time taken by the funeral procession, the difficulty the horses would have pulling a sled in summer -- while emphasizing how 'dywho' (strange or odd) some of the more ritualistic customs were -- dressing a young girl as a bride at her funeral and stopping at each crossroad during the funeral procession. This entire view of the old rituals can be wrapped up in his answer to the question: "How did these customs change over time?" He replied that today it was much better, since the funerals were much shorter and everything was handled by a funeral home, making it much easier on the family.

One interesting belief that John did mention, though, is the how the whole view of death has changed since his grandmother's time. Whereas today the separation and loss are emphasized in funerals, the generation which John's grand-

mother belonged to saw death not as life's end, but its continuation in a much better place where there is no sickness or hardship. The question now is did the changing world view alter the way funerals were celebrated, or did the changing facts of life in an ever-modernising society change the world view of the people? I believe that both are equally true, in that in the new land with new situations arising (the advent of funeral homes and the spread of hospitals) many of the old beliefs were lost, and with the loss of belief, rituals soon become almost meaningless tradition and thus were discarded as well.

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Які існують вірування про смерть, похорони, і.т.п.
пов'язані з цими звичаями?

Як з часом змінилися ці звичаї й вірування?

4.
 1. Чи існували якісь попередження чи знаки, які говорили про те, що в хаті скоро буде смерть?
 2. Чи можна було б уникнути смерті після цих попереджень?
 3. Чи всі люди вірили в ці попередження?
 4. Коли людина дуже хворіла, чи вона якимось чином до смерті готувалися?
 5. Що родина робила, коли вмирала людина?
 6. Як визначали, що людина вже померла? Хто це робив?
 7. Що ставалося, коли померла людина?
 8. Як готували небіжчика на похорон -- одяг, чистка, і.т.д. ? Хто це робив?
 9. Чи небіжчика клали в труну? Хто її робив? Як вона була?
 10. Де лежав небіжчик після смерті?
 11. Хто стояв навколо небіжчика? Що вони робили?
 12. Як скоро служили похорон після смерті люфени?
 13. Як перевозили небіжчика до церкви?
 14. Що ставалося перевозячи небіжчика до церкви?
 15. Що ставалося під час похорона?
 16. Після похорона, що ставалося?
 17. Де находився гріб?
 18. Як перевозили небіжчика до гробу?
 19. Що ставалося навколо гробу?
 20. Що потім ставалося? Чи поминки були?

21. Чи служили панахиди або щось таке? Коли? Що ставалося в цих панахидах?
 22. Хто все влаштував на похорони?
 23. Що робила родина? Як вона проходила?
 24. Що робили інші люди? Як вони проходили?
 25. У людей було спеціальний траур?
 26. Чи похорони змінилися, коли помер/померла: 1-неодружена?; 2-нехрещена дитина?; 3-самогубець?; 4-людина відлучена від Церкви?; 5-злочинець чи убивця?
 27. Як з часом змінилися ці похоронні звичаї?
5. Я буду базувати мою відомість переважно на інтерв'ю з одним інформатором, Іван Ахтимійчук, котрий я запишу на тасьмі.

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Пропозиція проєкту:

Буковинські похоронні вірування й звичаї

Пропозиція проекту:

Буковинські похоронні вірування й звичаї

1. Я збираюся досліджувати похоронні вірування й звичаї, як вони існували в буковинському населенні коло села Смокі Лейк в Альберті. Народні звичаї про смерть і похорони, як вид родинних обрядів, належать до фольклору, бо вони, супроти тих офіційних обрядів Церкви, неформально існують в людському житті; вони існували від стародавніх часів і в них зберігаються деякі примітивні, поганські вірування, часом без багатьох змін; вони передаються новим поколінням усно або прикладом, а не за допомогою формальних студій; певні звичаї інколи існують тільки в даній громаді, а не в інших громадах.
2. Я вирішив описувати похоронні звичаї буковинського населення східньо-центральної Альберти, як їх зазнав мій інформатор, Іван Ахтимійчук, живучи в цій громаді з 1918 року по наш час. Я також буду аналізувати вірування, котрі пов'язані з цими звичаями, щоб визначити їхнє значення. Укінці я хочу визначити, як змінилися ці звичаї й вірування, як громада розпадалася і як розвивалися і зміцнювалися її зв'язки з іншими громадами.
3. Якими були похоронні звичаї буковинських поселень в східньо-центральної Альберті нашого століття?