



Ukrainian Genealogy Group

National Capital Region

The Ukrainian Genealogist

May 2023

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April UGG-NCR Webinar

Prof. Natalie Kononeko, Ukrainian Ritual on the Prairies, Growing a Ukrainian Canadian Identity, The development of a Ukrainian culture specific to Canada.

On April 25, 2023, Prof. Natalie Kononeko made a presentation based on the research for her recently published book, *Ukrainian Ritual on the Prairies, Growing a Ukrainian Canadian Identity, The development of a Ukrainian culture specific to Canada*. She conducted her folklore fieldwork and interviews over a ten-year period in the rural areas of Alberta and Saskatchewan.



Natalie Kononenko, our April Speaker

In this presentation, she included information on the Sanctuary Project documenting the Ukrainian church buildings and sacral culture,

assisted by a team of colleagues from the University of Alberta. She began her presentation with a brief description of the first wave (1891-1914) of Ukrainian settlement on the Canadian prairies that were, at that time, considered by the Canadian federal government as essentially 'empty'. The prairie landscape - long distances, the transportation difficulties and rural isolation - did have an impact on the development of Ukrainian culture in western Canada.

Prof. Kononenko mentioned in particular, the role of the Ukrainian churches then and now in retaining aspects of Ukrainian language, traditions and culture. She explored the cultural elements of Ukrainian Canadian ritual practice, with emphasis on family traditions surrounding marriage, death, and religious holidays. During the 'horse-and-buggy' years that in some parts of the prairies, lasted until the end of the Second World War, churches were built within a relatively short drive by 'horse-power'. Local schools and small villages were also established in close proximity, many with Ukrainian names.

Since the local farming population was largely of Ukrainian origin, church holidays and secular traditions were celebrated and evolved over time. Christmas and Easter were especially important as religious celebrations with the accompanying traditions such as carolling and writing pysankas. Malankas (New Year celebrations), concerts, plays and similar events were an important part of the winter cycle of community social life.

During the post-Second World War economic boom, automobiles replaced horses, the 'baby-boom' led to increased numbers of Ukrainian

students in post-secondary institutions, and these and related events accelerated the trend of migration to the large urban centres. The farms became mechanized and large corporations acquired 'mega-farms' that hired labourers who usually do not reside in the rural areas. Farmers now could live in the urban centres and travel sometimes long distances to work on their farms.

These developments contributed to the decline in the rural population, decreasing the number of villages, and the closing of local schools, post offices and hospitals. Also, many of the local Ukrainian churches were closed, deconsecrated and in other cases, abandoned. Prof. Kononenko described how these social and economic factors influenced Ukrainian religious and community traditions.

Despite the closing of local churches, many of the local cemeteries are maintained by descendants of the early Ukrainian pioneers, some who travelled long distances from the United States and large urban centres to continue the tradition of honouring the graves of their ancestors. Prof. Kononenko gave examples of this adaptation with church and secular holidays that were sometimes amalgamated, wedding traditions that incorporated local customs, fund-raising practices such as bingos and auctions that over time became 'Ukrainian traditions'.

Malankas remain as one of the more popular events, a reminder of the former agricultural winter cycle of cultural events. The commercial aspects of maintaining cultural traditions have become dominant and this has led to the promotion of tourism and the erection of 'Prairie Giants' to attract tourists – the Pysanka in Vegreville, the giant sausage in Mundare, among other examples. Also, the tradition of annual Ukrainian Festivals that began in the 1960s in Dauphin, Vegreville and at other locations, have migrated to the larger urban centres in eastern Canada such as Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto. To many Canadians, these traditions and customs are now considered to be 'Ukrainian' and are an integral part of

Ukrainian Canadian and Canadian culture. And this is the definition of Canadian multiculturalism.

The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period. Prof. Kononenko's presentation along with the Introduction and the question-and-answer period has been recorded and is available on the UGG website.

Prof. Kononenko provided her coordinates:

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<https://livingcultures.ualberta.ca/sanctuary/>

The UGG expresses our condolences on the passing of Byron Johnson

Byron Johnson passed away on April 26, 2023, at the age of 94 at the General Campus of the Ottawa Hospital. Byron and Hazel regularly attended the UGG meetings when they were held at the parish hall. Byron, who had roots in the United States, expressed a genuine interest and raised questions at the meetings about Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history and culture. It was a pleasure to discuss his perceptive observations and commentaries regarding the life and experiences of the Ukrainian community. Our condolences to Hazel and his family. May his memory be eternal - Вічна Память .

From CBC Ideas

This CBC radio program may be of interest since there are references to the Ukrainian community in Sault Ste Marie and how the internment operations during the First World War had influenced the evolution of this community. There are interviews with Ukrainian members of the community and how they learned about the existence of the internment camps long after the camps were closed.

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/ukrainian-canadian-internment-camps-1.6843785>