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Spring 2012

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Albanski, Lukasz and Lehr, John C., "IDENTITY, INTEGRATION, AND ASSIMILATION RECORDED IN MANITOBA'S POLISH AND UKRAINIAN CEMETERIES" (2012). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1212.
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IDENTITY, INTEGRATION, AND ASSIMILATION RECORDED IN MANITOBA'S POLISH AND UKRAINIAN CEMETERIES

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ABSTRACT—Polish and Ukrainian rural cemeteries in southeastern Manitoba reflect the process of negotiating complex religious, geographic, and ethnic identities within Canadian society. Before 1914 the identities of Slavic immigrants from eastern Europe to western Canada were influenced more by religious affiliation than by geographic origins. This Slavic population, now assimilated into mainstream Anglophone society, retains elements of Polish and Ukrainian on grave markers as expressions of difference and acts of resistance against total homogeneity. In rural Manitoba grave markers record the process of exogamy and cultural blending, while cemetery landscapes replicate the social relationship between cultural groups from the same region in Europe. Headstone designs reflect economic progress, while language use reveals how ethnic identities were, and are, imagined and expressed.

Key Words: cemeteries, ethnicity, Manitoba, Poles, Ukrainians

INTRODUCTION

Cemeteries and churches are the most visible symbols of ethnic identity in the modern prairie landscape. But as congregations dwindle, prairie churches face an uncertain future of declining use, deconsecration, and abandonment. Cemeteries, however, as places of memory, remain etched in the landscape, the most enduring of sacred places “surrounded by the trappings of remembrance, emotion, and commemoration” (Sayer 2010, 59). Across the Canadian prairies, other elements of pioneer landscapes are fast disappearing. Traces of the multitude of ethnicities that were the hallmarks of prairie rural settlement are becoming ever more rare as rural depopulation and farm consolidation take their toll on the landscape. Even 40 years ago, domestic architecture with

roots in a half dozen European countries created a mosaic of distinct landscapes, but today there is scant evidence of cultural diversity, a result of onrushing modernity and the triumph of architectural homogeneity. Nowhere is this landscape transformation more evident than in those parts of southeastern Manitoba settled by people from central and eastern Europe at the dawn of the twentieth century.

CEMETERIES

Scholars from a variety of disciplines have studied the form and meaning of cemeteries (Kong 1999). In the 1960s most studies focused on the cemetery as an artifact of vernacular culture and tended toward description rather than analysis, as folklorists and some geographers catalogued styles of grave markers and noted regional

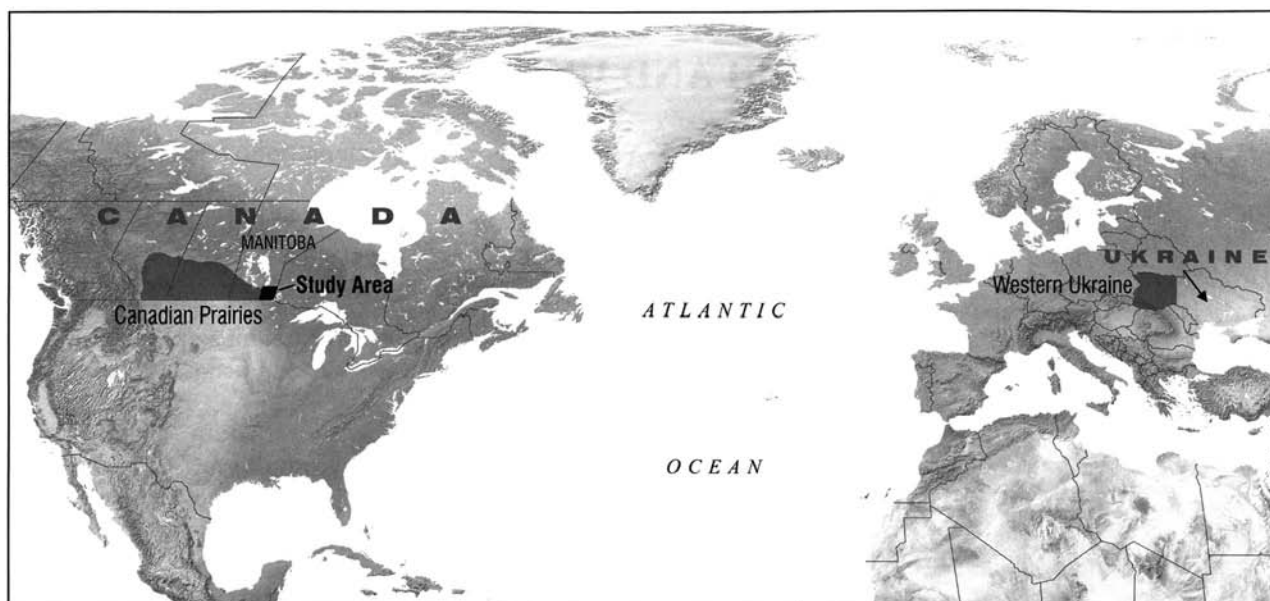


Figure 1. Map of the study area in Canada and the emigrant source area, western Ukraine.

variations in their design and their change over time. Kniffen (1967) argued that cemeteries could be valuable “indices of diffusion, evolution and invention,” but Jeane (1972, 146) made a plea for the end of descriptive “tombstone geography.” More recently, studies have explored the political and social meanings of the cemetery. Scholars acknowledge that cemeteries are repositories of social values. Deliberately created and highly organized cultural landscapes that express collective identity and collective memory, cemeteries are more than places to bury the dead (Francaviglia 1971, 501; Graves 1993, 42–55). Christopher (1995) and Kruger-Kahloula (1994), for example, have demonstrated that social attitudes and policies of racial segregation were manifest in South African and some United States cemeteries through the establishment of separate cemeteries for each racial group. Kruger-Kahloula (1994, 130) argued that patterns of burial reveal not only religious affiliation and social distinctions but also intra- and intergroup and personal relationships, and “project them into eternity.”

Within the cemetery, headstone inscriptions can be a historical record (Hargreaves and Holland 1997) and the language used in epitaphs, when carefully examined, can reveal much about the political attitudes and linguistic abilities of those burying their dead (Baird 1992, 1996; Eckhert 2001, 2002). Use of minority languages may be a symbol of resistance against cultural dominance and an assertion of identity (Mythum 1994), as well as a record of the progress of language change (Eckhert 2002). Even

the absence of grave markers can carry cultural meaning, as Lever (2009) has demonstrated. Geographers Lehr (1989) and Darlington (1991) have argued that the process of acculturation is embedded in the headstone decoration and the linguistic changes in epitaphs on headstones in Ukrainian-Canadian rural cemeteries on the prairies. Even pet cemeteries tell much about our attitudes toward death, burial, and the afterlife as they replicate the features and symbols of human cemeteries (Selwood and Lehr 1989).

SLAVS IN MANITOBA

From 1896, until the outbreak of war in Europe terminated immigration from Europe, thousands of Polish and Ukrainian immigrants settled on Manitoba’s agricultural frontier lands (Fig. 1). Ukrainian settlers vastly outnumbered Poles in most areas of western Canada, but in the late 1890s and the early years of the 20th century, a series of relatively small settlements were established in eastern Manitoba where the numbers of both Poles and Ukrainians were approximately equal: the Prawda-Hadashville, Cooks Creek, and Libau-Ladywood areas (Fig. 2).

Almost all these Slavic immigrants came from Galicia, an area that was a province of the Austrian Empire until 1918. In the eyes of the receiving society, these immigrants were simply Galicians, but the settlers themselves were keenly aware of ethnic and national differences. The “Galician” immigrants would describe themselves

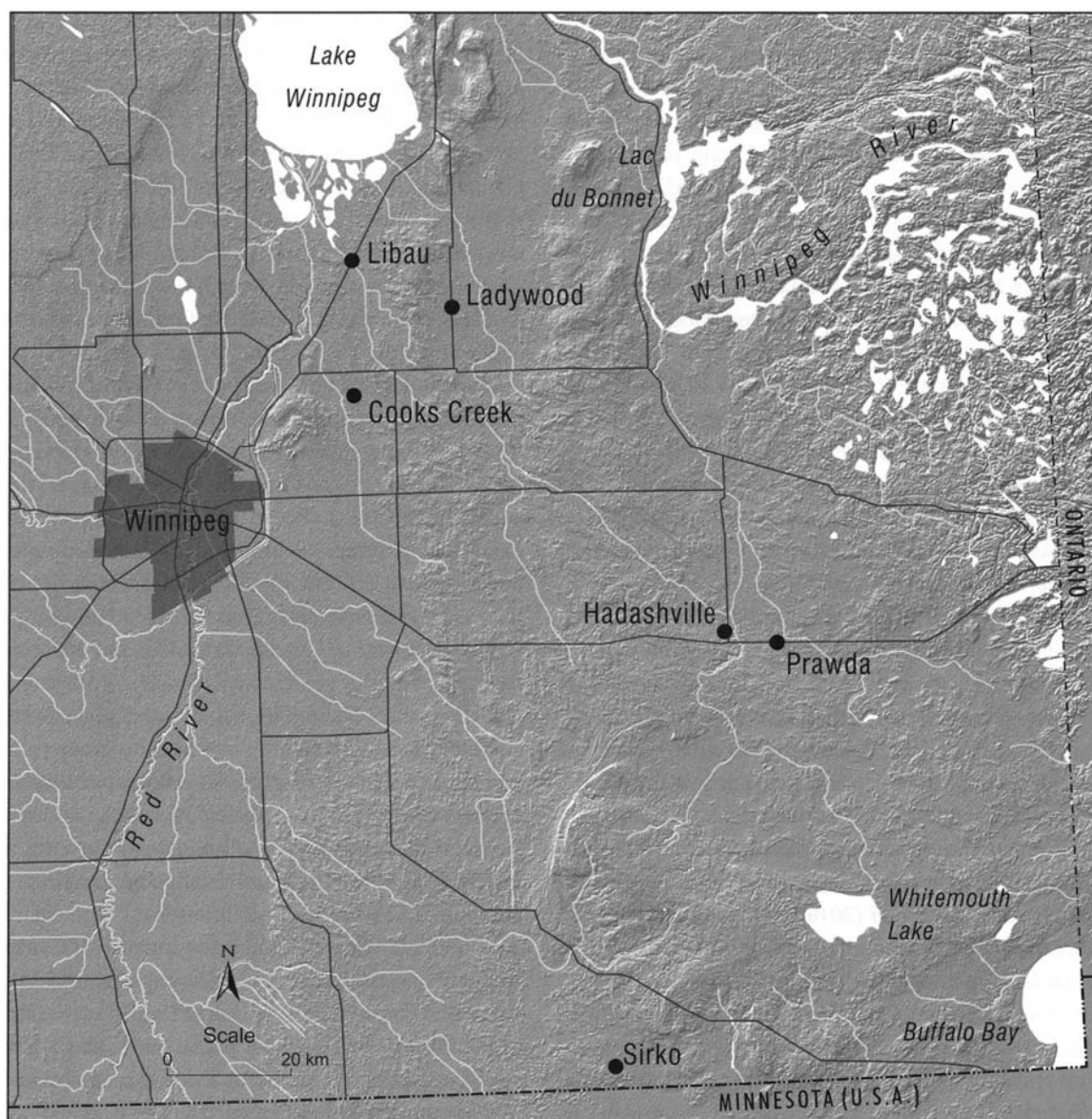


Figure 2. Towns in the study area, Manitoba, Canada.

as Polish or Ukrainian based on an identity constructed on religion, language, and culture, rather than by their geographical point of origin. Turczynski (1976) termed this a “confessional nationality,” since religious affiliation was conflated with national identity. In Canada, Slavs negotiated their identities both within this context and within that of a nativist society, one that saw little merit in distinguishing between Poles and Ukrainians and which simply cast them in the role of a homogeneous “other.”

Newly arrived Slavic settlers entered a world largely devoid of a cultural infrastructure that met their needs. Although their most pressing concern was survival in a harsh environment, the lack of spiritual outlets remained

a nagging concern. All societies need the rituals that govern the yearly round; they need to solemnize marriages, name children, and bury their dead. It is possible to delay marriages and christenings, but death does not wait, so settlers established graveyards and cemeteries as soon as they organized parishes, sometimes before.

Cemeteries carry cultural signatures, revealing religious and cultural identities. Eckhart (2001, 148), in a study of Czech-Moravian cemeteries in Texas, contends that “walking through the cemetery is like surveying the community history.” In cemeteries’ geographical locations, and the positioning of graves within them, family and even interethnic relationships are permanently entrenched in the

landscape. In Cooks Creek, for example, there are cemeteries serving the Roman Catholic community, which is mostly Polish with a few French and Métis. Ukrainian-Catholic cemeteries exclusively serve the Ukrainian community. Their locations reflect the pattern of ethnic settlement: Poles settled in the north of the community, Ukrainians in the south. Some 30 km to the north of Cooks Creek, the Libau area was religiously homogeneous though ethnically mixed, with Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles settling within the district. German settlers clustered together, and Ukrainians and Poles intermixed. Settlers of all three ethnic backgrounds lie in the Roman Catholic cemetery there. The socio-geographic relationships of the community in its early days are entrenched in the distribution of their burial plots. Ukrainian and Polish graves are intermixed on the cemetery's west side, and German graves occupied the east side, with the two groups separated by a undeveloped swath of territory some 5 m wide. United only by their Catholic faith and residential proximity, the Slavic and Teutonic communities retained a geographical expression of their separate identities even in death.

Grave markers and memorials similarly allow societies to express their culture, values, and norms. Choosing a grave marker and the inscription thereon is a deeply emotional process and one that is fraught with social meaning involving input from family and friends of the deceased, and often, from monument salespeople and engravers (Baird 1996, 138). As Sayer (2010) points out, the surviving generation governs the memorial process, the forms and symbols of memory and the rituals that accompany death and burial. In the selection of cemetery, the location of a gravesite within the cemetery, the form of the grave marker, headstone, or memorial, and the inscription and ornamentation placed upon it, there is a deep connection with identity, place, and territory (Mythum 1994, 253).

The physical appearance of religious symbols changes slowly, if at all. Congregations are reluctant to see change in liturgies or in the rituals of worship because they represent the familiar and give stability in a changing world. However, perhaps because of the complexity and severity of meanings embodied in Slavic pioneer cemeteries, their physical appearance has changed over time. Most obviously, the material employed to mark graves has varied according to accessibility, affordability, and desirability. Early markers in pioneer cemeteries were hand-hewn wooden crosses with hand-carved inscriptions. Few survive. By the 1930s concrete or wrought-iron markers had largely replaced them. In the 1950s more opulent and sophisticated polished granite headstones, which suggest greater permanence and respect, in turn displaced them

(Darlington 1991). Improved economic circumstances, desire for greater permanence, and resistance to cultural homogeneity impelled progressive changes in the materials used for headstones. This was common to all ethnic groups. In Zora's St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Cemetery, near Cooks Creek, for example, imposing granite markers have replaced many of the original concrete headstones of the 1920s and 1930s. Many original markers lie discarded in a corner of the cemetery. Those driving the memorials' renewal faithfully reproduced the original wording in Cyrillic script.

Language is a vital component of culture. According to some, our language determines the way we think, and it reflects the genealogy of our culture. For immigrants, language was a unifying theme, distinguishing their social group from the "other." Ukrainian settlers, for example, held that *bez movy, nema narodu* (without our language, we are not a people), and Polish immigrants held similar sentiments. Both peoples had endured linguistic restrictions under Prussian and Russian rule. Even within the multiethnic Austria-Hungary of the Habsburgs, Polish and Ukrainian were regarded as inferior languages spoken only by minority groups who were assigned second-class status. German was the language of the Austrian ruling class and the de facto language of imperial administration. In Canada, although immigrants were free to speak their native language within their own community, the need to communicate with mainstream Anglo-Canadian society necessitated use of English on a frequent basis. Government policy also promoted assimilation and favored the adoption of English as the language of the West. The Canadian press, both Liberal and Conservative, displayed a rare unanimity in agreeing that all immigrants should adopt the Protestant creed, abandon their ancestral languages and culture, and conform to Anglo-Canadian social mores (Lehr and Moodie 1980).

Within a decade or so of the first settlement of Poles and Ukrainians in Canada, their Canadian-based ethnic newspapers carried editorials inveighing against the erosion of language, equating it with loss of identity. The *Gazeta Katolicka* argued, "Every Polish parent is obligated to teach his or her children to speak and write Polish. Let us get together!" The editorial pointed out that many Poles appeared to turn away from their mother tongue:

Due to the fact that there has been total restriction of language use in their homeland under foreign rule, it is incomprehensible. Thus, their compatriots retain the Polish language in face of severe punishment. However, some

Polish settlers in Manitoba do not care for speaking Polish, and it must be understood that they are not threatened by any sanctions, as they might experience some penalty in the homeland. Moreover, Slavic people seem to be full of pride that they manage to change their names, or even surnames to make them sound more English. We can understand easily that they want to become more English, or even to gain an acceptance of the British people, but we cannot tolerate that they are sending letters to our newspaper, signed as John, Joseph, or Mike. We must add to that list Stanley and Lizzie as well. We cannot wait to see a letter from Maggie, Aggie, Rosy, and Emmy. After that, we would be able to create a list of new Polish names. However, we must ask ourselves do those names sound familiar? We doubt it. Therefore, our dear readers please respect and preserve your mother language. Use it as long as you can. Do not be ashamed of beautiful Polish speech. (*Gazeta Katolicka*, March 25, 1908, 4)

The editor later quoted Ruskin's poetry as an example of English patriotic pride, arguing that Poles should adopt a similar attitude toward their homeland (*Gazeta Katolicka*, May 11, 1908, 4).

The struggle for language retention played out in the fight for bilingual schools. Until 1916 Manitoba permitted bilingual education; thereafter only English was permitted as the language of instruction (Lehr and McGregor 2009). Thus until 1916 most Polish and Ukrainian children of school age who lived in rural areas had the opportunity to formally learn to read and write their parents' language. Although there was no legal restriction on the use of Polish or Ukrainian outside the school, a sea of English swamped both languages, so it increasingly became the lingua franca of the "foreign" settlements. The Slavic lexicon commonly incorporated English expressions; in fact, many Slavs were proud to demonstrate their proficiency in English as a mark of their social status. After 1916, Ukrainian and Polish were learned only at home, usually informally, and the formal instruction in grammar, reading, and writing was delivered, if at all, by the church clergy and secular enlightenment institutions. In the Ukrainian-Canadian press, correspondents from the Ukrainian settlements lauded those teachers who taught Ukrainian within the bilingual school system until its abolition in 1916 and thereafter as an extracurricular offering. There was a consensus among the Ukrainian in-

telligentsia that to maintain Ukrainian identity in Canada, language retention was vital. Ukrainians should follow the example of the Jews, wrote a correspondent from southeastern Manitoba, and teach their children both language and religion, the twin pillars of identity (*Canadian Farmer*, December 6, 1918).

Aware of the connection between language and culture as a distinguishing element of their identity, successive generations found it doubly important to embed the ancestral language into the commemoration of their dead. Cemetery markers bear testimony to this. The continued use of Polish and Ukrainian in headstone inscriptions resisted the overwhelming dominance of English in the secular life of Slavic communities. Congregations are notoriously reluctant to modify liturgies or the rituals associated with the practice of their faith. The rituals of burial are no exception. While it can be argued that maintaining the ancestral language on headstones was simply a manifestation of religious tradition, it is suggested here that it was a visible and conscious declaration of a collective memory of difference.

Variation in the language used in epitaphs recorded generational changes in spelling and grammar that paralleled changes in the spoken language of the immigrant communities. In the 1925 headstone inscription of Juzefa Benczarska, in Hadashville's St. John the Baptist Church Cemetery, for example, the inscription is in everyday peasant-style Polish, reflecting a lack of familiarity with the conventions of literary language (Fig. 3). On the other hand, the 1924 gravestone of Katarzyna Hula in Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery simply shows poor writing skills in Polish (Fig. 4). *Katarzyna* should be *Katarzyna*, and the word *przeżyła* (she lived) is incorrectly rendered as *pszczyła*. Occasionally, lack of familiarity with correct usage led to serious errors of meaning. That these were not identified and corrected at the time that the marker was placed suggests that the community as a whole was either not concerned or, more likely, was not sufficiently acquainted with literary Polish to be aware of the errors in the inscription. The invocation *Śpij w spokoju* (Rest in peace) was occasionally rendered as *Spi w pokoju*, which translates as "He is resting in the room," suggesting Polish was not spoken fluently by any family members, so the more subtle nuances of the language were lost on them (Fig. 5). Similarly, inscriptions on tombstones in Ukrainian cemeteries showed a lack of familiarity with literary Ukrainian. A generation whose knowledge of the language was strictly aural etched their pronunciation into unfamiliar Cyrillic characters, using *emy* instead of *homy* (to him), for example, misspelling



Figure 3. Josefa Benczarska's headstone, in the St. John the Baptist Church Cemetery in Hadashville, uses everyday peasant Polish language.



Figure 4. Gravestone showing poorly written Polish. Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery, Manitoba.



Figure 5. *Spi w pokoju* (He is resting in the room") is a poor rendition of the intended *Śpij w spokoju* (Rest in Peace) in Polish.

words and recording the rendition of the spoken language at a particular time. This trend continued when the transition was made into English. In Hadashville's Ukrainian-Catholic cemetery the English inscription on a 2001 memorial to the district's pioneers includes a rendering of the possessive *whose* as *who's*, a mistake the community was either unconcerned about or unaware of.

Cemeteries are not usually places of informality. The exception is the common use of diminutive forms of father (*Tato*), mother (*Maty*), grandfather (*Dido*), and grandmother (*Baba* or *Babucia*). All serve to express affection. Elsewhere, formality is the rule, and the evidence suggests that families strove to achieve this through adherence to standard expressions. It is unlikely that dialectical forms were deliberately inscribed on grave markers. On the other hand, humor is not always absent. In Sirko's St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Cemetery, one gravestone carries the injunction, in English, "Don't tell me what to do."

CULTURAL CHANGE

The content of headstone inscriptions records the assimilation process. On Ukrainian gravestones, the abandonment of Cyrillic script and its replacement by the Latin alphabet show the slow creep of acculturation.



Figure 6. Although most details are written here in Ukrainian using Cyrillic script, the names and relationships are rendered in English. The inscription says that Mother Katherine (Kateryna) was born in Novocil'tsi, in western Ukraine, and died at age 70 in 1939. Her husband, Joseph (Josef) Franko(w)ski, was born in L'viv and died in 1946 at age 76. They came to Canada in 1912. Prawda Cemetery.

Even when the switch was made to the Latin alphabet and English used for recording the deceased's name and personal details, the Ukrainian invocation *Vichna Pam'yat* (Eternal Memory) was usually retained in Cyrillic script (Fig. 6).

Among Poles and Ukrainians, names were soon anglicized. Wasył became Bill, Iwan turned into John, and so on. From the 1920s, *Maty* became "Mom," the formal *Bat'ko* (Father) morphed into the familiar *Tato*, then into the English "Dad." *Dido* (Grandfather) became *Gido* but *Baba* (Grandmother) seemed immune from change. In Prawda's cemetery, the Moskwa family's grave markers reveal a steady process of acculturation. Some members kept their Polish names (Fig. 7); others changed them into English variants: Tomasz became Thomas on a completely anglicized gravestone (Fig. 8). Surnames were no exception. In virtually every Polish or Ukrainian cemetery in southeastern Manitoba, members of the same



Figure 7. The process of acculturation. Retention of Polish name but adoption of "R.I.P." in Prawda Cemetery.

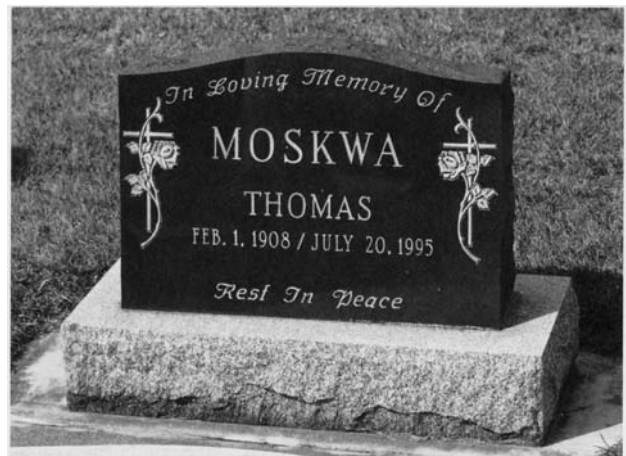


Figure 8. Total anglicization of a Moskwa family grave marker, Prawda Cemetery.

family spelled their surname in different ways. At times, this resulted from cavalier recording of names by immigration agents who tried to reflect the phonetics of an unfamiliar language, as best they could, without regard to the conventions of transliteration. In other instances,

father and son would have slightly different spellings of the family name as anglicization proceeded. Even very Polish names such as Wojtek (Wojciech) became Vojtech to mimic the English phonetic pronunciation, an indication that the ability to write in Polish was diminishing (Fig. 9). Figure 10 illustrates how both last and first names were altered to facilitate interaction with non-Polish society, demonstrating that the level of interaction with mainstream anglophone Canadian society had developed to the point that Poles now considered themselves *a part* of the mainstream rather than *apart* from it. Here Cza has become Chay, and the female name Aniela anglicized to Nellie.

For others, correct language use was a fundamental part of their identity. Figure 11 shows a memorial in Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery to Stanisław and Karolina Kolbuch, both born in Poland, with an inscription in perfect Polish. In the same cemetery is a solitary gravestone with a Cyrillic inscription, the grave of a Roman Catholic (Latinized) Ukrainian. Retention of the Ukrainian vocabulary and Cyrillic alphabet was a symbolic affirmation of a Ukrainian rather than Polish identity despite membership in a largely Polish Roman Catholic congregation and burial in a Roman Catholic cemetery. For settlers such as these, identity was not a clear-cut matter; it was complicated by religious and cultural adherences often seen to be opposed.

This confusion of identities is best illustrated by reference to one individual whose national identity was negotiated within a milieu where religion and nationality were frequently conflated. Wasyl Nazarewicz was born in Stare Oleszyce, Galicia, located in an area now in Poland, close to the present Ukrainian border. At the time of his emigration, this was a mixed Ukrainian and Polish area, and most immigrants from the area would have defined their nationality as Austrian but their ethnicity according to their religious affiliation: Catholics were Polish and Eastern-Rite Catholics (Ukrainian Catholics) were Ukrainian. They had what Turczynski (1976, 189–93) termed a “confessional nationality.” After immigration to Canada in 1897, Nazarewicz settled in Cooks Creek, Manitoba. He became an active member of Holy Ghost Roman Catholic Parish in Winnipeg; in fact, he was married in that church, and documents show he was an active parishioner. On this basis, he would appear to be Polish. However, he donated a few acres of his Cooks Creek property to St. Nicholas Ukrainian-Catholic parish for use as a cemetery, and he, his wife, and their children are buried there, suggesting that the Nazarewicz family were ethnically Ukrainian, and self-identified as such.



Figure 9. Wojtek (Wojciech) became Vojtech, which represents a linguistic change in Polish to mimic English pronunciation.



Figure 10. Alteration of first and last names, from Polish to English, indicates acceptance of mainstream values.



Figure 11. Stanisław and Karolina Kolbuch were both born in Poland. Their inscription is in perfect Polish. Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery.

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS

Slavic settlers were frequently of mixed ethnic origins. In eastern Galicia Ukrainians and Poles sometimes intermarried. Such unions were more common between the Latynyky (Roman Catholic Ukrainians) and Poles. Wenzel Baker's gravestone in Ladywood Roman Catholic Cemetery testifies that intermarriage also occurred between Poles and Germans. Born in Bekersdorf, Galicia, in 1848, Baker died in Ladywood, Manitoba, in 1916; by that time, he was a member of the district's Polish community (Fig. 12). Although in this instance we do not know if intermarriage took place, in other cases there is unequivocal evidence. A gravestone in Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery documents intermarriage between the Dombrowski, Lamb, and Ouellette families, when Polish, English, and French (quite probably Métis) ethnicities were merged (Fig. 13). It is difficult to determine with certainty the ethnic background of the surname "Hart," (Fig. 14), which could be of English or German origin, but when accompanied with a Christian name of Rozalia, it seems that a Pole married outside her ethnic group and did so in the early years of settlement.

Attachment to one's homeland is a powerful and enduring emotion, a core element of identity, sufficient for some to desire its commemoration from beyond the grave. Most usually this is seen in straightforward statements as to where the deceased was born. In Ukrainian rural cemeteries, headstones of the first settlers frequently carry a simple statement in Ukrainian confirming they were born in Ukraine or, more commonly, giving the name of a village or district as the place of birth. Some examples from Sts. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Cemetery at Ladywood illustrate this well. Figure 15, a memorial to Ben and Ludwika Kupczynski, not only provides images of both but also tells that Ben was born in Ladywood, Manitoba, and his mother, Ludwika, was born in Buczacz, Poland (now in Ukraine). The inscription also reveals that Ben died in Chicago, Illinois, in 1944. Similarly, an adjacent memorial tells that Jan Greszczuk was born in Zobowie, Małopolsce (Little Poland or Galicia) (Fig. 16). Stanisław Polkowski's headstone reads in Polish that he was born in Pennsylvania in 1892 and had a hard life, until his death in 1918: "He suffered a lot and experienced a miserable life. Before he died, he made his peace with God. Rest in peace here." Occasionally a more dramatic statement really clarifies the strength of feeling attached to national identity. The memorial to a Polish veteran in Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery carries the now faded inscription of the white eagle, the Polish national



Figure 12. Although he was born in the German colony of Bekersdorf in Galicia in 1843, Wenzel Baker was fully integrated into the Polish community near Ladywood. His inscription is in Polish.



Figure 13. Intermarriage between Polish, English, and French. Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery.



Figure 14. Although information is scanty, this marker suggests Polish-English intermarriage. Cooks Creek Roman Catholic Cemetery.



Figure 15. This tombstone gives dates and places of birth and death. Sts. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Cemetery, Ladywood.

emblem, circumscribed by the words *Czolem Ojczyźnie, pazurem wrogowi* (Respect your country, lacerate your enemies).

In eastern European peasant society, death was perceived to be an integral part of life. Child mortality was countered by high fertility rates, so the death of a child, while tragic, was common. Women sometimes died in childbirth. Real tragedy was when the breadwinner passed away, which could spell economic disaster for the widow and children. To die alone or away from one's home territory was also considered tragic. To die in a foreign land far from home increased the emotional trauma of death for those close to the deceased. It disrupted the circle of nature in that the deceased could not return to the soil of the homeland, to which European peasants had a strong and almost mystical bond. The complex concept of a bond between a people in their land is difficult to express in English. "Home territory" is too narrow a term and "sense of place" fails to capture the emotional tie to the land. The German term *heimat* comes close, but in Polish, the word *swojskość* describes precisely the concept of a personal bond with the land and the soil. In peasant society, the preservation of traditions was important, thus the ritual of burial, and burial in one's ancestral land had deeply symbolic meaning. To symbolize respect and the deceased's place in the world and to maintain the continuity of life even in death, appropriate commemoration and burial within the sacred ground of the village cemetery or church graveyard was needed. In Canada, when the Canadian-born generation laid their immigrant parents to rest they faced not only the loss of a parent but also the erosion of *swojskość*—the symbolic tie to their ethnic homeland. By adorning their parents' graves with

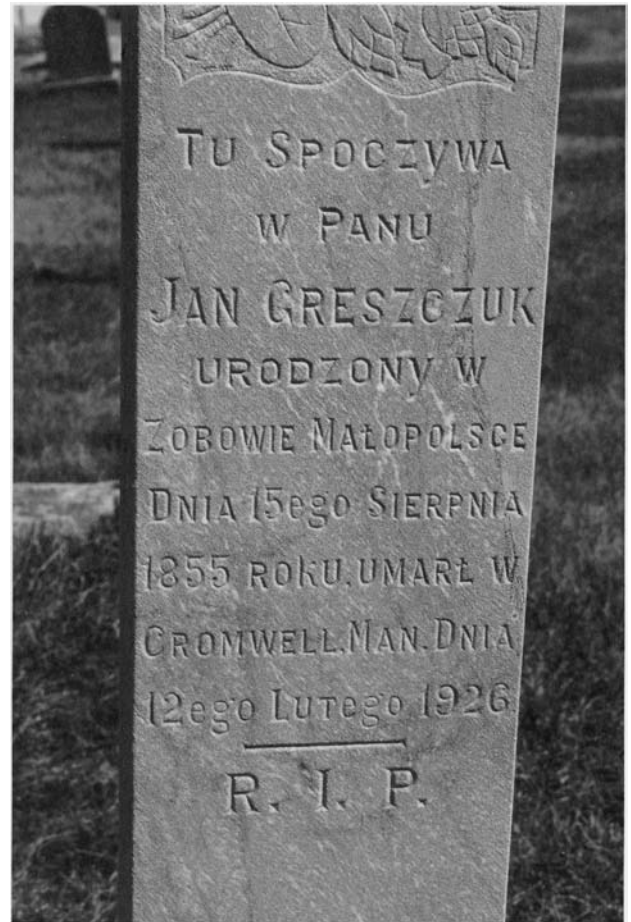


Figure 16. In Sts. Peter and Paul Roman Catholic Cemetery at Ladywood, Jan Greszczuk's headstone tells, in Polish, that he was born in Zobowie, Little Poland (Galicia) and died in Cromwell, Manitoba.

both secular/national and religious symbols, and by using the sacred language of the homeland in the epitaph, the bereaved appropriated territory and reaffirmed commitment to their heritage. It was a gentle act of remembrance and resistance.

By the 1940s new loyalties were replacing the old attachments to European homelands among second- and third-generation Canadians. To the Canadian-born, Canada was their home and where their first loyalties lay. While they may have retained a sentimental fondness for their parents' ancestral land, Canada was *their* country, and they demonstrated their commitment to it by serving in the Canadian armed forces during World War II. When this generation passed, around the end of the 20th century, their headstones displayed family pride in their service, with details of their combat experiences sometimes recorded. In the Immaculate Conception Ukrainian Catholic Cemetery in Cooks Creek, for example, the epitaph of Nicholas Syrotiuk proudly states, in English,

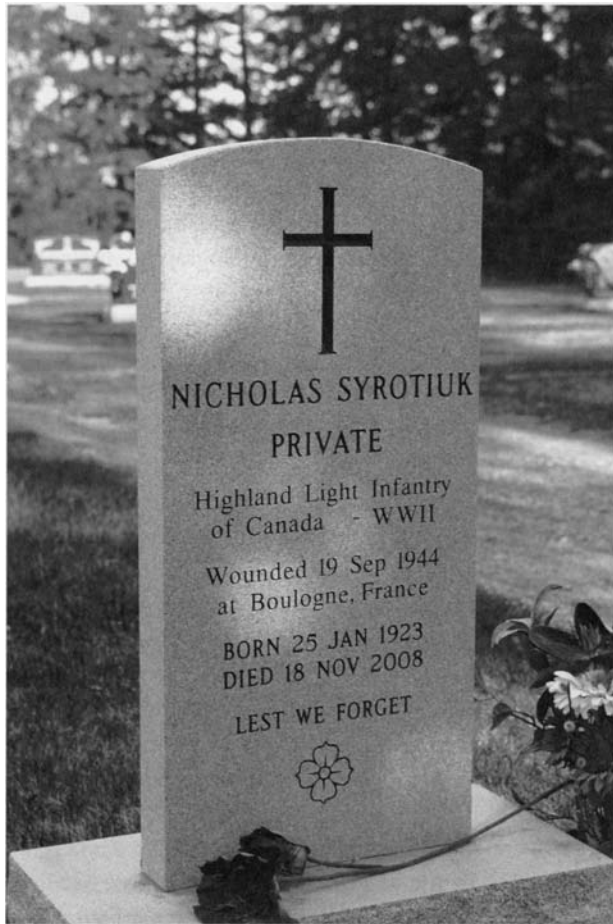


Figure 17. New marker identifies those who served in the Canadian forces. Cooks Creek Ukrainian-Catholic Cemetery.

that he was a private in the Highland Light Infantry and wounded in action at Boulogne, France, in September 1944, leaving no doubt that his primary identity was Canadian (Fig. 17). Similarly, in Sirko's St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Cemetery, the English-only inscription on the grave marker of Eli Skrumeda states that he was a "Veteran W.W. II 1942–1946," who was killed on April 23, 1946, while mining in Ontario (Fig. 18).

CONCLUSION

Cemeteries express the collective memory of a society in a concrete, visible, and enduring way. In the ethnic borderlands of southeastern Manitoba, the ways through which those of Slavic ancestry expressed identity in the wider cultural landscape declined as they adopted British social norms. Domestic architecture, once a strong marker of identity, faded from the landscape in the 1960s and 70s; wearing "ethnic" clothing was uncommon long



Fig 18. This headstone in St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Cemetery, Sirko, Manitoba, gives details of occupation and place of death.

before then, and fluency in Polish or Ukrainian, common in the 1920s and 1930s, became far less so by the end of the century. The rituals of death and commemoration showed symbolic resistance to the process of globalization and cultural homogenization. The increasing opulence and expense of grave memorials mirrored and symbolized economic progress within North American society.

Many of the features identified in Slavic cemeteries can be seen in the rural cemeteries of other ethnic groups that settled across the Canadian prairies. All groups apart from the English and French were subject to the same assimilative pressures and erosion of ancestral languages. In the larger urban centers the picture is less clear, primarily because large cemeteries would serve a multitude of ethnicities. Large urban Roman Catholic cemeteries served French, southern Germans, and Poles; Protestant cemeteries accommodated British and a host of peoples from northwestern Europe: Icelanders, Swedes, Finns, Norwegians, and northern Germans.

In a spatial sense, cemeteries trace the geography of rural ethnic group settlements. Epitaphs and inscriptions record the identities, histories, and affiliations of those within them. As such, they are a record of social attitudes

at particular times and reveal much about the way that individuals, families, and communities constructed and negotiated their identity at particular times in the past, and how they continue to self-define. The examples given here selected from cemeteries in the Polish- and Ukrainian-settled areas of southeastern Manitoba, show how modernity encroached into traditional life and eroded long-held cultural practices. The changing forms of grave memorials and the nature of the inscriptions on them also give voice to the past and speak to the present.

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