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ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES ON UKRAINIAN CANADIAN WEDDINGS*

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ЕТНОГРАФІЧНЕ ВИВЧЕННЯ ВЕСІЛЛЯ УКРАЇНЦІВ КАНАДИ

У статті аналізується стан вивчення весільної обрядовості українців в Канаді. Розглядаються сучасні етнографічні записи та узагальнення щодо збереження окремих елементів обряду.

Ключові слова: весілля українців в Канаді, етнографічне дослідження, структура українського весілля, іммігрантська культура.

Ukrainian Canadian weddings are syntheses of traditions and rituals from the ancestral homeland and the new environment. Earlier traditions were adapted in the creation of new, modified practices. Once an initial Ukrainian-Canadian structure was established, it continued to change throughout the last century. The history of the Ukrainian Canadian wedding can be divided into two time periods: before and after 1945.

Surprisingly, few systematic ethnographic studies on Ukrainian Canadian weddings of this first period have been published. In many cases, Ukrainian wedding customs were partially described in discussion of other issues. Swyripa discussed a number of sources related to Ukrainian Canadian weddings from a historian's perspective by using wedding records as a research resource¹. According to Swyripa (1993), marriage was an area where the Canadian environment had a significant impact on and joined forces with the imperatives of the Ukrainian community to affect both attitudes and practices (p. 79). The issues that would dominate discussions about Ukrainian Canadian marriages had all been raised by 1910. For example, it has been claimed that for twenty-five or thirty dollars, Ukrainian immigrants routinely "sold" their thirteen- and fourteen-year-old daughters into marriage (p. 80)². According to Swyripa, one author claimed that the problem arose from the misunderstanding of an important wedding ritual in which the groom displayed his affluence by presenting the bride's parents with a gift of money. Before 1945, Anglo-Canadians often associated Ukrainian marriage with the image of the 'child bride.' However, the average age of marriage for brides ranged from 17.3 to 18.5 years old while fourteen-year-old brides were a rarity, and seldom did one-third of the brides in any year marry at age sixteen or younger. However, Anglo-Canadians thought that Ukrainian girls in the block settlements of western Canada married too young. Swyripa (1993) assumed that this perception reflected the peculiar emigrant/immigrant experience of Ukrainian homesteaders in the Prairie provinces. According to her, in prewar Galicia, fewer than one-third of Ukrainian brides were under twenty years of age. Alberta reported roughly the same fraction of brides marrying under twenty in this period, and in the Anglo-American and Scandinavian areas of the province, comparatively prosperous and with different cultural backgrounds, the age of marriage for both brides and grooms was significantly higher than in the Vegreville bloc. Other findings warn against generalization even in relation to Ukrainian settlements. Swyripa assumed that decisions on marriage were influenced by local variables like the time of settlement, the quality of land, and opportunities for agricultural expansion or employment. In the early 1920s, a rapid and permanent drop in the proportion of Ukrainian Canadian brides who were sixteen or younger, from 30.0 to 4.8 per cent,

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increased the seventeen-to-nineteen age group in particular. By the end of the Second World War, half to three-quarters of Ukrainian Canadian brides were in their twenties (pp. 87 – 88).

Swyripa (1993) also introduced evidence suggesting that the pragmatic needs of a modernizing peasant society in an emigration/immigration situation influenced Ukrainian marriage practices. The 'Bride Wanted' advertisements appearing in Kanadiiskyi farmer (Canadian farmer) between 1906 and 1920 represented one response of bachelors deprived of a traditional source of potential wives in a novel and unnatural situation, particularly for men who lived away from the bloc settlements (pp. 81 – 82).

Swyripa's (1993) work also indicated the marriage patterns of the early Ukrainian immigrants. She explained that despite the tendency of kin and villagers to settle in identifiable pockets, emigration offered new choices in marriage partners and a new gene pool:

In 1908 only 13 per cent of contracting parties came from the same village; fully one-half of all marriages over the next three years involved people who came out only from different villages but also from different districts in Galicia; and by 1920, when forty of sixty-nine marriages involved partners who were both Galician born, 72.5 per cent of contracting parties came from different districts. Marriage entries also support the contention that circumstances encouraged speedy engagements, unions that stressed economic considerations ahead of love, speedy remarriage on the death of a spouse, and young brides. One young widower, for example, initiated proceedings to marry presumably his first choice in mid February but, later in the month, settled on his dead wife's seventeen year old sister (p. 84).

According to the traditional Ukrainian wedding customs, weddings were usually set in two favoured time periods; weddings were not performed during the two great fasting periods before Easter and Christmas, so that most weddings were in November, after harvest, and in the winter months, before Lent and spring planting. This tradition has been preserved, but the mainstream idea of a June wedding became pervasive among Ukrainians by 1945. Also by 1945, the Sunday wedding tradition became irrelevant and replaced by Saturday weddings, influenced by the rhythm of the urban workweek.

In 1915 half of all weddings occurred in November, January, and February. By 1945 less than a third did so; and the summer months (June – August), perhaps reflecting adoption of the mainstream idea of the 'June bride', became the preferred season for nuptials. By 1945 weddings had also shifted from a majority on Sunday, traditionally chosen because the peasant was free from labour for the landlord, to Saturday, the off-day in North American urban industrialized society. Sunday weddings were unusual among the Ukrainians' Anglo-Canadian neighbours; in thirty-nine years, only nine of 347 marriages solemnized by ministers of the Vegreville United (Methodist) Church took place on that day. Wednesdays and Fridays, fasting days in the Greek Catholic calendar, were more popular. To farmers who ordered their lives around the natural cycles of the seasons, the rhythm of an urban work week was long irrelevant, and Saturday waited until the 1990s to triumph as the unrivalled day on which to celebrate weddings in the Vegreville bloc. (Swyripa, 1993, pp. 85 – 86).

With few exceptions, the Ukrainian Catholic bride in east-central Alberta in 1945 married within her group, and in the great majority of cases, she married within her faith. Nationwide, some three-quarters of Ukrainian-Canadian women still belonged to the Ukrainian Catholic or Orthodox Churches; over 90 percent still spoke Ukrainian as their mother tongue, and, despite a significant decline in religious endogamy, some two-thirds still married Ukrainian Catholic or Orthodox husbands. Most adult Ukrainian women who had received a formal education delayed marriage, and exposure to 'civilization' through the school and workplace remained the norm for the Ukrainian-speaking, church-going wives of Ukrainian farmers.

While Swyripa's (1993) work explained the marriage patterns of Ukrainians, Nahachewsky (1983) and Procyshyn (1983) provided valuable descriptions of Ukrainian Canadian wedding rituals in the early 20th century³. These two authors described two actual weddings in Swan Plain, Saskatchewan in 1920, and Winnipegosis, Manitoba in 1931, respectively. Nahachewsky compared his grandfather's wedding with Kuzela's (1961) general description of traditional weddings. Nahachewsky listed 20 wedding traits under six broad categories: Commencement [dopyty, svatannia, uhovoryny (agreement), rozhliadyny (inspection of the groom's family's assets)], Preparations [licence, vino (dowry), zaprosyny (invitation of wedding guests)], Vinkopletennia [vinok (wreath), derevtse (wedding tree), vykup vinochka i buketiv (buying of the bride's wreath and bouquets), vyhuliannia (dancing

with the bride), *uberannia* (dressing of the bride), *blahoslovennia* (blessing)], Church marriage [*pokhid* (wedding procession), *shliub*, bride and groom each go home, *vesillia u molodoi* (celebrations at the bride's house)], abduction [*poizd* (wedding train), *svashky's* (middle-aged women who participates in various wedding rituals) singing, *darovannia* (presentation of gifts)], and Groom's *vesillia* [*vesillia u molodoho* (celebrations at the groom's house)]. The author then analyzed the wedding elements in terms of the influence of four factors: (1) the momentum of tradition and the ideal form, (2) the personalities of the various individuals and their own desires and decisions, (3) incidental circumstances, and (4) the Canadian context. Despite some differences, the Swan Plain wedding followed the basic structure of a traditional wedding. In terms of this present study, this wedding had two interesting features. Firstly, the wedding preserved remnants of the so-called preparation or commencement rituals, such as *dopyty*, *svatannia*, *uhovoryny*, and *rozhlidyny*, which have now all disappeared. Secondly, Nahachewsky did not mention that the Swan Plain wedding included a *korovai*. According to Nahachewsky, the Swan Plain wedding was similar to the description of Galician weddings in Shubravs'ka's *Vesillia v dvokh tomakh*. Neither the Lodyn nor the Orel'tse accounts of Galician weddings include a *korovai*. However, Nahachewsky also mentioned that a particular trait might be omitted from the description of a wedding because a researcher or informant regarded it as insignificant.

Procyshyn (1983) compared three weddings that had occurred in three different years and places: 1936 (Ukraine), 1931 (Winnipegosis, Manitoba), and 1962 (Petlura, Manitoba). The second one provides a good example of the Ukrainian Canadian wedding before 1945. The author divided this wedding into four parts and explained the wedding traits of each part: Courtship and Engagement (the ritual of matchmaking), Preparation for the wedding (the invitation ritual⁴, the selection of wedding attendants⁵, the wreath-weaving ceremony⁶, the wedding tree, *korovai* and three *kolach* (ritual bread)), Wedding Day (the blessing, the couple's procession to the church⁷, walking down the aisle together, kneeling on the white embroidered towel⁸, and the Reception (party at the bride's home, the bride's moving to the groom's home⁹, welcoming the bride, party at the groom's home, *vivat* play (verse sung in honour of the couple during *darovannia* or *perepii*), *darovannia*¹⁰)¹¹. Even though this Winnipeg wedding occurred 10 years after the Swan Plain wedding, it still included many traditional wedding traits, following the basic structure of the old wedding tradition. However, the Winnipegosis wedding also indicated the new influence of the wedding industry. The bride and groom ordered bouquets and corsages from Eaton's catalogue. The groom wore a dark suit, and the bride wore a veil and white wedding gown. Both outfits had been ordered through the catalogue.

Klymasz (1980) discussed the Ukrainian Canadian wedding after 1945. His study indicates that even though some older traditions are no longer followed in today's weddings, the Ukrainian Canadian wedding today survives as a kind of maintenance mechanism promoting a sense of ethnicity and strengthening ethnic distinctiveness among Ukrainian Canadians:

It is true, of course, that, compared with the intricate, Old Country wedding ritual complex, the Ukrainian wedding has lost most of its traditional trappings, which over the years have been reduced to the essential components: food and drink, "presentation", and music. This process of reduction, however, has been accompanied with that amplification or, as it were, hyperbolization, which in the case of the Ukrainian wedding is especially evident in the use of instrumental music as an ever-present continuum from beginning to end, linking all the varied elements, dispersed activities and the participants into one whole acoustic phenomenon. Basically, then, the Ukrainian wedding can be considered as an auditory event capable of promoting the production of a certain psychological state which its participants generally refer to as "a great time!" (pp. 87 – 88)

Numerous undergraduate and graduate students have studied the Ukrainian Canadian wedding between 1945 and 1980, and their research articles are now deposited in the Bohdan Medwidsky Ukrainian Folklore Archive at the University of Alberta.¹² In one of those articles, Hanchuk (1985) provided a detailed description of a Ukrainian Canadian wedding in 1960. Hanchuk divided this wedding into three parts: the preparations for the wedding, the wedding proper, and the post-wedding activities. She listed the "phenomena" (or ritual traits) that are included in the traditional Ukrainian wedding and looked for those traits in the Ukrainian-Canadian wedding. She concluded that her informant's wedding included an equal number of Ukrainian and Canadian traditions. Some elements such as dress and the roles of the wedding attendants had changed drastically while the food, music and customs such as the *perepii* (ceremony with a toast) had been preserved and

retained in close to their original forms with no or few notable changes. Even though the informant believed that she had had a traditional Ukrainian wedding, her wedding included several major changes of the traditional wedding. These changes became standard in the Ukrainian Canadian weddings of the next generation. First, the bride was thirty-five when she married. The average age for marriage had risen by 1960. Second, her wedding was held on a Saturday. According to the informant, Saturday was the most popular day for a wedding because people did not have to work on this day. Third, she said that summer weddings were by far the most popular because the weather at this time of year is warm. Fourth, the ritual of inviting guests in person to the wedding was not practiced any more. Specially printed wedding invitations were distributed by mail to family and friends. Fifth, new rituals such as the bridal shower were organized by the participants. Sixth, the tradition of re-braiding the bride's hair was not followed in this Ukrainian-Canadian wedding. Instead, the bride's hair was curled and cut short. Seventh, a photographer was hired to photograph the wedding. After the church service, the bride, groom, their parents, and the attendants left by car to go to take photographs. Eighth, the non-Ukrainian customs of tossing the wedding garter and bouquet were incorporated into this wedding. Ninth, the informant had a wedding cake, and also a korovai. At this wedding, the korovai was cut into pieces and eaten at the home of the bride on the day after the wedding. As Hanchuk mentioned, this wedding was not traditional and shared many new traits in common with the contemporary Canadian wedding.

The Ukrainian Canadian wedding during the last 20 years

Many studies including students' essays and M.A. theses at the University of Alberta have focused on the Ukrainian Canadian wedding of this period¹³. Some of these studies discussed the issue of continuity and change in the Ukrainian wedding tradition while others focused on specific objects or rituals, such as the korovai, wedding costumes, vinkopletennia, divych vechir or mock wedding. Ukrainian-Canadian weddings vary from region to region and from rural to urban settings across Canada. Some of these differences result from the Ukrainians' specific immigration patterns. Others have arisen from ethnic, economic, social, geographic, and other factors which vary from place to place within Canada. The list of all scholarly works on Ukrainian Canadian weddings of this period will be found in footnumber 13.

¹ She discussed Ukrainian weddings in *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891 – 1991* (1993) and *From sheepskin to blue jeans: A brief history of Ukrainians in Canada*. (1991). In R. B. Klymasz, R. B. (Ed.), *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada*. Quebec: Canadian Museum of Civilization.

² This was the claim of a Mrs. Chisholm, addressing the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Hamilton, Ontario, reported in *Kanadiiskyi farmer* in late 1905.

³ These materials are deposited in the Ukrainian Folklore Archives at the University of Alberta.

⁴ The bride and bridesmaids were driven around by horse and sleigh to the homes of everyone in the area. In each home, the bride bowed her head three times and said, "My father invites you and my mother invites you and I invite you to my wedding." The groom did the same in his area. About 50 to 70 neighbors and friends were asked to each wedding.

⁵ The matron of honour was the bride's cousin, and the best man was a friend of the groom's.

⁶ The ritual was performed a week before the wedding at the bride's home. The author did not use the term "*vinkopletennia*" in the article. During the wreath-weaving ceremony, the bride's "*titka*" [aunt] did the weaving, but the bridesmaids and all the women in the district attended. The wreath was made out of myrtle while the bride sat on a pillow. The wreath was placed on the bride's head. All the women unplaited the bride's hair, combed it and sang songs. When the wreath was finished, the groom had to bid money to buy it, while the bridesmaids tried to drive a hard bargain.

⁷ The groom came to pick the bride up with his team of horses, and they both rode to the church together with the bride's two attendants.

⁸ Hardly anyone from either family came to the church service, for each family had too many things to do before the guests arrived.

⁹ Music and clapping took place, as they were welcomed into the new reception at the groom's home. Joking and merriment took place. When the bride and groom arrived at the groom's home, people hid the bride from the groom's parents and instead, dressed up an old man like a woman. The in-laws said that they did not want the bride as she was too ugly and the bride's parents kept insisting that their daughter was beautiful and that the old woman was somebody else. There was joking and singing all this time. Finally, the true bride is allowed to come forth. She kneels before her new parents and is then invited to come into the home.

¹⁰ The presentation took place before midnight. A dish was put out for presentation, and people gave change and dollar bills. Some gave small gift towels, cups and dishes. The bride and groom received seventy dollars in cash.

¹¹ The groom brought the bride and her attendants to the bride's home from the church, and they stayed at the reception in the bride's home until morning. Then they went to the groom's wedding for the whole day. When the bride arrived at the groom's home, the musicians came outside to play for them as they were coming into the house. They had to bow their heads and shake hands with everyone present. They were then led to the main place of honor at the table. Some of the foods served at the party were chicken soup, boiled chicken meat, pork, meatballs, cabbage rolls, cider, homebrew and home-made beer.

¹² About six articles deal with Ukrainian Canadian weddings of this period: (1) Hanchuk, Rena. (1985) The not so traditional traditional Ukrainian wedding: A study. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 29 pp. (1985.004), (2) Korec, William. (1988). Ukrainian-Canadian weddings (1965 – 1988). Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 51 pp. (1988.004), (3) Kostyriuk, Katherine. (2000). Ukrainian Wedding Traditions. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 17 pp. (2000.145), (4) Kryschuk, Anna-Marie. (1977) *Vinkopletennia z Horodyns'koho povitu*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 6pp. (1977.001), (5) Procyshyn, Mary. (1983). A comparative study of three Ukrainian weddings. Unpublished manuscript. University of Manitoba. 17 pp. (1983.046), (6) Sokoluk, Lisa. (1988). Women and their weddings: definition by context. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta, 11pp. (1988.003).

¹³ Boychuk, V. (1994). *Porivnial'ne doslidzhennia dvokh ukrains'kykh vesil'*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 14 pp., Cherwick, B. (1990). The Ukrainian Wedding: The effect of membership in Ukrainian cultural organizations on retention of Ukrainian wedding traditions. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 20 pp., Foty, N. (2000) Canadian *Vinkopletennia*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 18 pp., Gaborak, C (1998). Wedding Dress. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 8pp., Garbera, W. (1986). Ukrainian mixed marriages. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 15 pp., Jabora, k, Christina. (1988). Wedding Dress. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 8pp. Martiuk, A. (1988). *Divych Vechir* or *Vinkopletennia*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 12 pp., McDonald, L. (1995). The Ukrainianization of Canadian Weddings. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 19pp., McDonald, L. (1998). Making *Korovai*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 9 pp., Osinchuk, L. (1998). *Vinkopletennia*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 18pp., Robinson, G. (1985). The Ukrainian-Canadian wedding. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 27 pp., Shevchuk, L. (1982). *Sviato! Vesillia*. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 7 pp., Slawuta, J. The Ukrainian Wedding. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 15pp., Swarbrick, M. (1988). [Weddings] – Ukrainian rites of passage. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 12 pp., Teslyk, T. (2000). Ukrainian-Canadian Weddings. Unpublished manuscript 12 pp., Wasylciw, W. (1993). *Vesil'nyi khorovod*: The birth of a ritual. Unpublished manuscript. University of Alberta. 6pp., and Foty, N. O. (2003). *A Celebration of Folk Burlesque: Ukrainian Mock Weddings in Saskatchewan*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Hong, Sogu (2005). *Ukrainian Canadian Weddings as Expressions of Ethnic Identity: Contemporary Edmonton Tradition*, Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

В статье анализируется состояние изучения свадебной обрядности украинцев в Канаде. Рассматриваются современные этнографические записи и обобщения относительно сохранности отдельных элементов обряда.

Ключевые слова: свадьба украинцев в Канаде, этнографическое исследование, структура украинской свадьбы, иммигрантская культура.

This study aims to introduce ethnographic researches on Ukrainian Canadian Weddings in Canada. It explains how Ukrainian wedding customs have been described and analyzed in Canada. Introducing various authors' works, this study gives some idea on research trends and characteristics of ethnographic studies on Ukrainian Canadian wedding rituals.

Key words: Ukrainian Canadian wedding, ethnographic study, Ukrainian wedding pattern, immigrant culture