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The Fiftieth Annual Shevchenko Lecture

Ukrainian Emigration to North America: The 125th Anniversary

SPEAKER
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Mass emigration to North America, which began in Galicia in the late nineteenth century, was an ambiguous experience for the Ukrainian village. Since it was most often energetic and enterprising young people, in the first phase usually young men, who ventured abroad in search of a better life, emigration entailed a significant brain drain. Many had to sell their houses and fields to pay for the voyage, and these were often bought up by outsiders, compromising the solidarity of the village. Quite often, emigration also divided families: men who went abroad and women who remained at home found new partners.

But emigration was also a great opportunity for poor Ukrainian peasants. Confronted with unfamiliar (and sometimes daunting) experiences, such as travelling by ship, they overcame their fears and gained self-confidence. Many

emigrants returned to Galicia after a few years with money they had earned and now invested at home. They built new houses or modernized their old ones; they bought land—the main aim for many—and animals, or even machinery. North American earnings often allowed returnees to marry and start a family. They also brought back fresh ideas and attitudes, as well as a new work ethic. In most Galician villages there were no clocks, not even on the church tower, so people told time by the sun. In North America, emigrants learned time and work management and mastered new methods in agriculture, the use of machinery, and other skills.

The “Americans,” as the returnees were called, were both admired and envied. And they were often imitated, bringing about a virtual revolution in village attitudes and practices.

Martin Pollack, born in Bad Hall, Austria, in 1944, studied Slavic literature and East European history. He worked as an editor for *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg) until 1998 and is now a freelance writer and translator. His German-language books include *Charged with Patricide* (2002), *The Dead Man in the Bunker: Discovering my Father* (2004, English translation 2006), *From Minsk to Manhattan: Polish Reports* (edited collection, 2006), *Why Did They Shoot the Stanislaus?* (2008), *The Emperor of America* (2010), and *Contaminated Landscapes* (2014). The last two books, as well as *The Dead Man in the Bunker*, have been translated into Ukrainian. A translation of Pollack's most recent book, *Galicia*, will appear in 2016.

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