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**THE LITTLE-KNOWN LIFE OF LEO LEPKY IN AMERICA**

From November 9-10, 2022, scholars gathered in Ternopil at the National State University named for Ivan Puluji and at the Bohdan Lepky Museum in Berezhany, Ukraine. Scholars in Ukraine and in Poland discussed and praised the works of Bohdan Lepky. His works of fiction and of fairy tales, his poetry and even the lyrics to *Chuyesh Brate Mij* (Do You Hear, Brother?) are well-known in Ukraine and in Poland where he spent many years writing and teaching. As the conference illustrated, the passions aroused by the works of Bohdan Lepky are still deeply felt. His much younger brother, Lev Lepky, as he was called in Ukraine, is much less well-known and if he is discussed at all, it is due to his role in writing the music for *Chuyesh Brate Mij*, and it was his music which inspired a nation. Less is known about Lev than Bohdan, and almost nothing is known about his life after he left Europe and immigrated to the United States. The purpose of my presentation at the conference, therefore, was to piece together the threads that provided a clue as to where he lived and what he did in the U.S. What I learned highlighted how much more research can be done in this area.

The research into Lev Lepky's life proceeded like an investigation: it relied on documentary evidence from Europe, statistical databases in the U.S. and where possible, with information gleaned from evidence about his wife, Marie. The role of scholarly research resembles the work of the detective. For example, place names were sometimes unclear as the spelling in English were not always consistent with Ukrainian transcriptions. In the document *Europe, Registration of Foreigners and German Persecutees, 1939-1947*, provided herein as Figure 1, Lev Lepky's birthplace was listed as Poruczyn and his homeland is listed as Czercze, though proper transliterations would have spelled them Poruchyn and Cherche. Inconsistencies aside, the document provides valuable information, if not insight, into Lev Lepky's occupation as a *Schriftsteller* or bookseller and his wife's position as an *Angestellte*, or Senior Employee. If we look beyond Lev and his wife Marie, it is possible to see

other family members also listed, namely, Leo Rostyslav, Natalie, and Sofie. The family's presence may not seem remarkable until one examines the 1950 Census.

Name	Vorname	Geb.Dat.u. -Ort	Sex	Heimats- ort	Gegenwärtige -Anschrift	Besch.-Besch.- Ort	Besch.- Art
Hapalowska	Marie	27.7.10	w.	Stryj	Blenhofen	Leberg	Angestell- te
Jarencz, szyn	Michael	18.11.04	m.	Drohobycz	"	Drohobycz	Arzt
Jarencz, szyn	Marie	29.1.09	w.	Drohobycz	"	"	o.B.
Jatzenko	Kryharij	12.9.95	m.	Leberg	Serbtschhofen	Leberg	Lehrer
Jatzenko	Anna	25.1.99	w.	"	"	"	Angestell- te
Jatzenko	Daniel	2.9.20	m.	"	"	"	Student
Klynenko	Peter	29.6.95	m.	Leberg	Blenhofen	Leberg	Lehrer
Klynenko	Larisa	25.10.97	w.	"	"	"	o.B.
Klynenko	Valentin	9.9.28	m.	"	"	"	Schüler
Kosak	Gewerjn	25.5.93	w.	Leberg	"	"	Prinzipal Lehrer
Kaltschayek, j	Michael	23.5.28	m.	Leberg	"	Kaminke	Angestell- ter
Kantsch, nok, j	Anna	24.9.94	w.	Leberg	"	Krakau	Schrift- steller
"	Helene	8.4.97	w.	"	"	"	o.B.
"	Tatjana	28.11.21	w.	"	"	"	Angestell- te
"	Georg	16.5.24	m.	"	"	"	Student
Lepki	Leo	7.12.88	m.	Czerone	"	Krakau	Schrift- steller
"	Marie	15.5.02	w.	Leberg	"	"	Angestell- te
Lepki, j	Leo Bantys- law	10.3.90	m.	Krakau	"	Krakau	Angestell- ter
Lepki	Natalie	6.9.01	w.	Krakau	"	"	"
Lepki	Sofie	24.12.04	w.	"	"	"	"
Mr, o	Jwan	12.8.06	m.	Leberg	"	Leberg	Arzt
Kinder derzeit unter 15 Jahren							
Jarencz, szyn	Soldan	22.7.41	m.	Drohobycz	Blenhofen	"	Sohn
Jarencz, szyn	Doris	16.5.38	w.	"	"	"	Tochter
Kosak	Georg	5.5.35	m.	Leberg	"	"	Sohn

Zurückseite Blatt 2

Figure 1: Europe, Registration of Foreigners and German Persecutees, 1939-1947 available on Ancestry.com

In the United States, a national census is taken every 10 years and the names and addresses of everyone, theoretically everyone, in the United States is listed along with information about who they are, where they live, and in older Censuses, what countries they were from, and what their occupations were. The Census aims to be accurate but for several reasons, some people are not counted. People who are in the country illegally, for example, do not want to be interviewed and people who are homeless are not easily found. The 1950 Census is provided as Figure 2.

Figure 2: 1950 U.S. Census

The lines related to the Leo Lepki and his family are provided below as Figure 3.

Figure 3: Excerpt from the 1950 U.S. Census

The 1950 U.S. Census is intriguing for a number of reasons. Ignoring the inconsistencies in the spelling of the last names (Marie’s last name seems to be spelled “Lepkyj” while Leo Rostyslav’s last name is spelled “Lepki”), Marie is listed as the head of the household, not her husband. Marie is no longer a Senior Employee. Rather, she and her mother make ladies hats, while Leo makes bouquets



in a flower shop. An occupation that seems far removed from that of a soldier or a bookseller or writing music for Chuyesh Brate Mii.



Figure 4: Leo Lepky, the soldier.

We have a picture of the soldier, we do not have any pictures (at the moment) of the man who makes bouquets. In addition to information about the Marie and Leo, it is possible to see from the Census that the family that was meticulously documented in Europe and described as

“Persecutees” is now living together at the same address in the Bronx, New York. It was common for immigrants coming to New York City to live in the Bronx on a wide boulevard called the Grand Concourse. My great-grandfather who came with his family from Zhokva, in the Lviv Raion, also moved to the Bronx and lived on the Grand Concourse. The buildings that are there now are the same ones that housed Leo Lepky and his family and from Google Maps, we can see the building listed on the Census below and imagine what life was like for them.



Figure 5: The building in which Leo Lepky and his family lived on the Grand Concourse

Another source of information was the document showing Leo Lepky's request or petition to become a naturalized U.S. citizen. From this document, we can see that Leo Lepky is no longer living on the Grand Concourse, but on Marmion Avenue, shown below as Figure 7. His request to become a U.S. citizen is dated August 15, 1966 – more than 10 years after his wife became a U.S. citizen. While the documentary evidence provides clues as to what happened to Leo, it leaves unanswered many questions: when did Leo and his family immigrate to the U.S.? How did they get here and who sponsored them and helped them find work and place to live? What were the personalities of Leo and Marie like and why was she the head of the household? Why was Marie naturalized 10 years before Leo? The scholars at the conference speculated that she spoke English better than her husband and so was listed by the interviewer as the Head of the Household and her ability to speak English would have facilitated her becoming a U.S. citizen before Leo.

New York, U.S., Index to Petitions for Naturalization filed in New York City, 1792-1989

TV No. 8739895

Name **LEPKY, LEO**

residing at **1933 Marmion Avenue, Bronx, N.Y.**

Date of birth **December 7th, 1888** Date of order of admission **August 15th, 1966**

Date certificate issued **August 15th, 1966** by the

**U. S. District Court at New York City, New York**

Petition No. **991138** Alien Registration No. **7.231.648**

*Leo Lepky*  
(COMPLETE AND TRUE SIGNATURE OF HOLDER)

Figure 6: Petition for Naturalization to become a U.S. citizen



Figure 7: Picture of the house on Marmion Avenue

Leo Lepky died on October 28, 1971 and his last known residence was in Cream Ridge, New Jersey, a town about 30 Km southeast of Trenton, New Jersey. Interestingly, there is a street in Cream Ridge named Lepky Avenue. Was it named after Leo or his more famous older brother? Marie died 17 years later in 1988 but they are together for eternity at St. Andrew Cemetery in South Bound Brook, New Jersey. Their names are engraved in Ukrainian on the bottom of their gravestone – Lev and Maria. [See Figure 8 below.] It seems Leo adopted an Americanized version of his name and I like to think that at the end of his life, he felt closer to the country he was born in and wanted his name to be Lev once more.



Figure 8: Gravestone of Lev and Maria Lepky.

I would like to thank the organizers of the conference for allowing me give a presentation on Leo Lepky and his life in America. It was a journey that perhaps raised more questions than it answered but provides a starting point for further research.