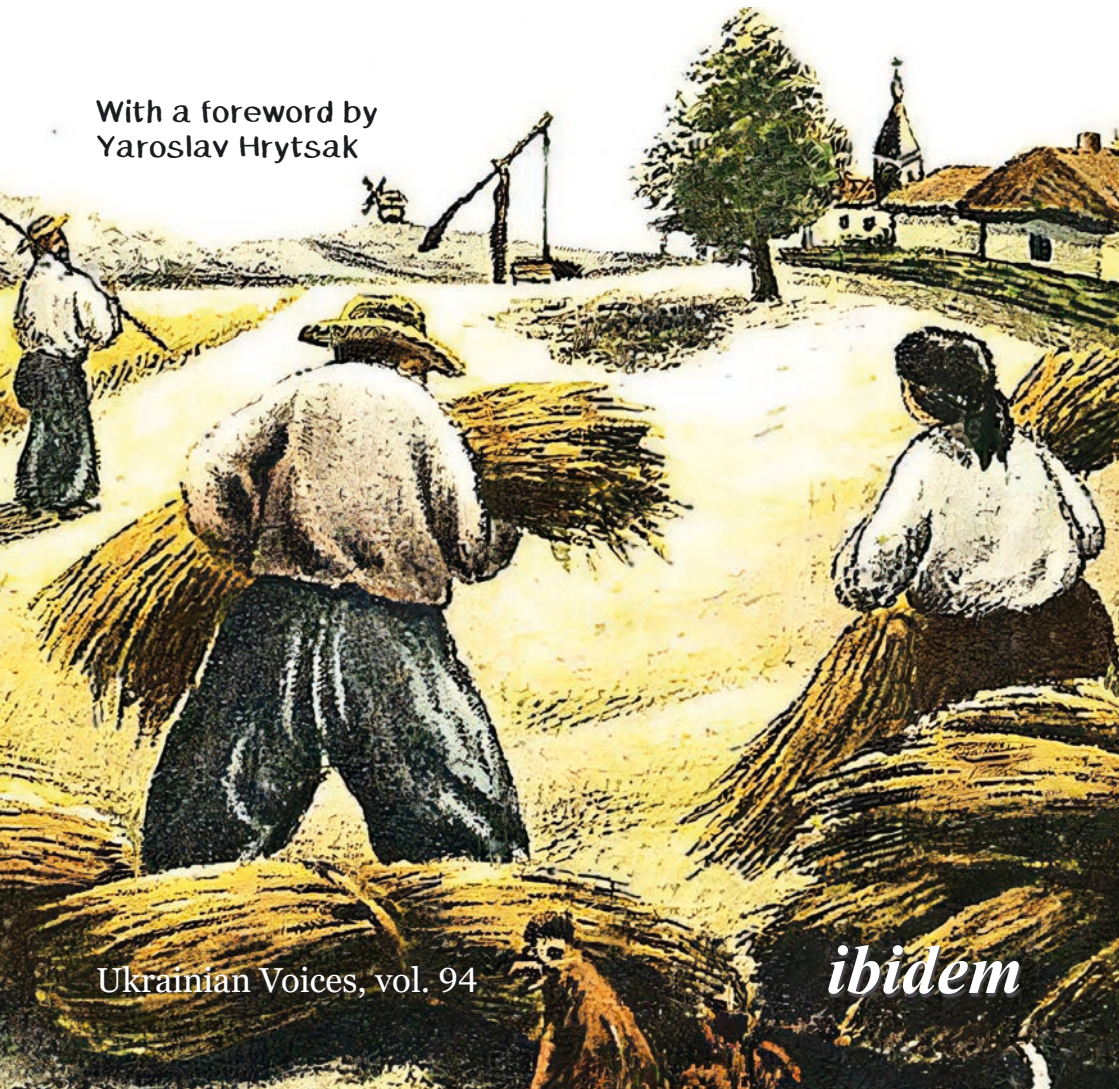


Stephen Velychenko

# A Village in Revolutionary Ukraine

How Bolshevik Rule Changed a People:  
The Diary of a Common Man, 1918-1928

With a foreword by  
Yaroslav Hrytsak



Ukrainian Voices, vol. 94

*ibidem*

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# UKRAINIAN VOICES

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# Contents

Foreword by <i>Yaroslav Hrytsak</i> .....	7
Introduction.....	19
Part 1: The Context	
Chapter 1.....	32
The Place .....	32
Political Events.....	36
Ukrainian Institutions .....	42
Church and Religion .....	47
Land and People before 1919 .....	51
Chapter 2.....	63
Political Events.....	63
Bolshevik Institutions.....	73
Land and People after 1918 .....	90
Living Conditions .....	101
Partisan War .....	114
Illustrations.....	125
Photos.....	133
Part 2: The Diary	
Chapter 3 (1919–1924).....	140
The Bolsheviks Came Uninvited and Ruined Us.....	140
NEP? What NEP?.....	155
The Previously Poor Now Have No One to Take From.....	168
Chapter 4 (1925–1928).....	179
How People Enriched Themselves.....	179
Nothing Much Happened, but for Churches and Taxes .....	190
Conclusion.....	199

## Tables

1.	Total Orthodox Churches, Clergy and Lay Christians 1914, 1925 .....	51
2.	Chernihiv Province Average Land Tenure 1900-1914 .....	56
3.	Recorded Agrarian disorders in Ukraine and Chernihiv Province 1907-1917.....	60
4.	Rural Soviets and Poor Peasant Committees 1923, 1925 .....	88
5.	Estimated Population in Thirteen Chernihiv Province Settlements 1914-1923.....	102
6.	Village Dwellings Chernihiv Province and Ukraine 1924 ...	107
7.	Socio-Economic Indicators in the Hrebinky region 1917-1923 .....	108
8.	Estimated number of partisans, partisan units and nominal political allegiance .....	124

## Foreword

Stephen Velychenko is one of the most productive and provocative (in the positive sense) historians in Ukraine. He asks questions that most researchers ignore and provides answers that allow us to understand the past better. There are many examples. They include his research on imperial administration in the western borderland of the Russian Empire,<sup>1</sup> peculiarities of urbanisation in Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> and the status of Ukraine as an imperial colony.<sup>3</sup> In recent decades, he has been studying the Ukrainian national revolution of 1917–1922 and the emergence of communist power in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> His most recent work is the book you are holding in your hands. It is based on the diary entries of 1919–1928 by Kostiantyn Sambursky, a resident of the northern Ukrainian village of Huzhivka.

Velychenko does not have the honour of discovering this important historical source. Sambursky's diaries were published in 2015,<sup>5</sup> in a series of books about the history of the Ichnia region, which takes its name from the Ichnia River in northern Ukraine, close to the Russian-Ukrainian border. The project was funded by the late Ukrainian journalist and politician Vitaliy Shevchenko

- 
- 1 Stephen Velychenko, "Identities, Loyalties and Service in Imperial Russia: Who Administered the Borderlands?," *Russian Review*, Vol. 54, no. 2 (Apr. 1995) 188-208; Степан Величенко, «Царський уряд в українських губерніях 1800-1914 років — всемогутність чи слабкість? Деякі зауваження до методології й інтерпретації», *Україна Модерна*. Число 2-3/1999, с.219-224.
  - 2 Stephen Velychenko, "Ukrainians and Cities 1861-1917. Not so Rural and not so Russified," *MISTO* [Kyiv], no. 1 (2017) 49-64.
  - 3 Степан Величенко, "Чи була Україна російською колонією? Деякі зауваження щодо поняття колоніалізм", *Україна модерна*. Число 14(3)/2009 (*Марксизм на сході Європи*), с.266-281.
  - 4 Stephen Velychenko, *State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); idem, *Painting Imperialism and Nationalism Red: The Ukrainian Marxist Critique of Russian Communist Rule in Ukraine, 1918-1925* (Toronto-Buffalo-London: University of Toronto Press, 2015); idem *Propaganda in Revolutionary Ukraine. Leaflets Pamphlets and Cartoons, 1917-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); idem, *Life and Death in Revolutionary Ukraine. Living Conditions, Violence, and Demographic Catastrophe, 1917-1923* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2021).
  - 5 К. І. Самбурський, *Щоденники, 1918-1928 рр. Гірка українська історія очима псаломщика з Гужівки*. Київ: Гнозис, 2015.

(1954–2018). The diaries were prepared for publication by local historian Viktor Morenets.<sup>6</sup> He added to the original diaries a number of additional materials: a list of manuscripts and artefacts collected by Sambursky, fragments from the memoirs of fellow villagers (one of them, 102-year-old Paraska Portnyanko, who still remembered Sambursky), a history of the local religious community, materials about the activities of local anti-Bolshevik partisans, and a list of villagers deprived of voting rights. Including these additions, the book totals 1000 pages in small print. This is a volume that few readers will be able to digest. Only 500 copies were printed by a small publishing house. It was hardly available at the time of publication, and now, ten years later, it has become a bibliographic rarity.

Velychenko, therefore, deserves special credit for making this diary available to a wider audience. He summarises it in an abridged form in English. His merits do not, however, end there. He has written an extensive introduction and conclusion that constitute a separate monograph which can be read on its own. The book will surely become a must-read for anyone who deals with the revolutionary and interwar history of Ukraine.

There is no need to retell or comment on the entries. I only want to draw attention to their value in historical and political contexts. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the geopolitical importance of Ukraine, not for the first time. The country has been geopolitically important for at least the last hundred years. As Dominic Lieven argued in his recent book on the collapse of the Russian Empire, "as much as anything, the First World War turned on the fate of Ukraine."<sup>7</sup> The geopolitical importance of Ukrainian lands was primarily determined by their wealth of natural and human resources that were essential for modern total warfare. Additionally, its size and central geographical position in the Eurasian continent were important for any state aspiring to the status of a global superpower. After many years of war and revolutions, the

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6 See a short list and review of his works: "Архівні свідчення в дослідницьких працях Віктора Моренця," *Український Світ. Час і часопис*. 23.10.2021, <https://ukrsvit1.com.ua/liudy/suspilstvo-pravo-lad/arkhivni-svidchennia-v-doslidnytskykh-pratsiakh-viktora-morentsia.html>.

7 Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London: Allen Lane, 2015).

main winner was Bolshevik Russia, which evolved into the USSR, a twentieth century superpower. But because control over Ukraine was a necessary condition for its superpower status, it lost that status with the secession of Ukraine in 1991. The First World War marked the beginning of another large-scale process—the transformation of Ukrainians from an ethnic community into a modern political nation. Tellingly, all the political regimes that emerged during the war and revolution had the adjective “Ukrainian” in their names, be it the socialist Ukrainian National Republic, the conservative Ukrainian State, or the Bolshevik Ukrainian Socialist Republic. Victorious Bolsheviks managed to expel all their rivals from former tsarist Ukraine. There remained, however, one large and rather disobedient social group that they could neither expel nor ignore: Ukrainian peasants. On the eve of the First World War, they made up almost 90% of the local population. Historians of the Russian and Ukrainian revolutions focus mainly on the rivalry between the urban educated elites. Few studied the peasants, a silent and largely illiterate majority, and this is a shame because as the most insightful historians emphasize, the character of the Bolshevik regime was largely shaped by the conflict between Bolsheviks and peasants.<sup>8</sup>

Sambursky’s diary illustrates this conflict in detail. He began writing it long before the First World War. Unfortunately, this part has been lost, so we do not get an idea about the characters in his village before the war. The memoirs of the famous Ukrainian film director Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894–1956), however, whose native village, Sosnytsia in the Chernihiv region, 100 km north of Huzhivka, can give some insight here. Dovzhenko recalled a conversation he had with his father when he was a young boy, in the early 1900s:

Dad!

What is it, son?

What kind of people are sailing there?

It's from far away. They are from the Orlovski region. Russian people, sailing from Russia.

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8 Андреев Грაციози, *Большевики и крестьяне на Украине, 1918–1919 годы. Очерк о большевиках, национал-социализмах и крестьянских движениях*. М.: АИРО-XX, 1997.

And who are we? Aren't we Russians?  
 No, we're not Russians.  
 What are we, Dad? Who are we?  
 Who knows who we are? We are simple people, son. We are farmers, those  
 who work with bread. We are peasants... Yes... Oh, yes... peasants, and that's  
 it.  
 Once upon a time, they say, we were Cossacks, but now only the title re-  
 mains.<sup>9</sup>

This fragment reveals an identity pattern that was common for traditional ethnic communities: their members knew who they were not, but could not tell who they were. Their identity was based mainly on language and folk songs. It did not have a clear-cut national or political dimension. One may presume that before World War I, this pattern was typical for most of the local population.

Another intriguing moment in the Dovzhenko memoirs is his father's reference to Cossack status. In the past, the local villages were part of the Ukrainian Cossack state. Cossacks are a central symbol of Ukrainian *national* identity. The Ukrainian national anthem even states that all Ukrainians are of "Cossack kin". In Huzhivka and neighbouring villages, every third family was of Cossack origin. Cossacks treated Ukraine as their national homeland.<sup>10</sup> They waged wars against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that had Catholic elites, a numerous Jewish population and a Uniate/Greek Catholic church. There, Cossack identity was built according to the formula "Ukraine without Pole, Jew, and Uniate." By this token, the local population was quite homogeneous in ethnic and religious terms: it was almost entirely ethnically Ukrainian and Orthodox by faith. Even though Muscovy/Russia incorporated the Cossack state, the local Ukrainian population did not mix with the inhabitants of Russian villages to the North. Russian Empress Catherine II abolished that state in 1764. Still, ambitions for political autonomy remained alive among local Cossacks for a long time.<sup>11</sup> Yet,

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9 Олександр Довженко, *Зачарована Десна. Україна в огні. Щоденник*. Київ: Веселка, 1995. С. 49–50.

10 There are several books and articles on this topic. See the most recent: Zenon Kohut, *Making of Cossack Ukraine. Political Thought, Culture and Identity Formation* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 2025).

11 Олександр Оглоблин, *Люди старої України*. Мюнхен: Дніпрова хвиля, 1959.

we do not find the memory of the Cossack state in this part of Sambursky's diary. To paraphrase the words of Dovzhenko's father, "only the name of it is left."

We know nothing about Sambursky's pre-war identity other than that his father was a priest in the Russian Church and he belonged to a priestly dynasty — sons in a priest family inherited their father's rank. This may explain why Sambursky did not think the recently re-established Ukrainian Orthodox Church had canonical status. The fact that he actively collected historical artefacts and turned his house into a private museum shows him, nonetheless, to be a local patriot. Sambursky kept his diary in Russian, not Ukrainian, which likely indicates his loyalties were divided between his small Ukrainian homeland and the larger Russian Empire.

The situation in the village he describes was not exceptional. In the process of creating modern nations, peasants were latecomers everywhere. The formula for a modern nation—a community where political rights belong not only to the secular and clerical nobility but also to all classes, including the peasantry—was born during the French Revolution. The American historian Eugene Weber has shown that even a hundred years after the French Revolution, most French peasants did not feel French. They lived in their small and isolated communities and considered themselves Bretons, Gascon or Provençal, not French. The transformation of peasants began in the 1870s and was completed before the First World War. It was the result of modernisation, which included the development of schools and railway networks and mass mobilisation. This process began in the 1870s and completed its main features just before the First World War.<sup>12</sup>

There was very little of this in the Russian Empire. It was a large but backward empire. Here, the autocratic power of the monarch remained virtually unrestricted by anything and anyone until the last days of the Russian Empire. Serfdom was abolished only in 1861 — the last such act in Europe. Thereafter, illiteracy rates among the liberated peasantry remained high, and high population growth intensified landlessness. The situation was particularly dramatic in the Ukrainian lands where land hunger was particularly acute. In

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12 Eugen Weber, *Peasants Into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

addition, the number of schools had significantly decreased since the abolition of the Cossack state, the Ukrainian language was banned as a language of instruction, and the Ukrainian presence in large cities—the centres of political and economic power—was minimal.

The First World War was a turning point. It destroyed the old regime, and in a few years had produced changes that in peacetime would have taken decades. Among other things, the war accelerated the transformation of peasants into a nation. The First World War amounted to the greatest invasion of modernity into the traditional peasant world and triggered its disintegration.<sup>13</sup> This is a key theme in Sambursky's diary. He is nostalgic for his pre-war life. In his opinion, it was quite stable and marked by trust and solidarity among the villagers. This stability was based on religious and patriarchal norms. All those norms had been in decline since the war. Religious beliefs weakened, young people increasingly disobeyed their elders, and trust between people disappeared. In particular, Sambursky writes about how difficult it became to borrow money from neighbours.

The published diary begins with a description of the last act of the First World War in Ukraine: the withdrawal of German occupation forces. By this time, the local population had already experienced three regime changes: in March 1917, the Russian Empire collapsed, the Central Rada was formed in Kyiv and proclaimed the Ukrainian National Republic, and in April 1918, as a result of a coup d'état and with the support of the German command, Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky came to power. Then the UNR was re-established in December 1918. The diary begins with the latter change, which was barely felt in Huzhivka. The main events took place outside the region. The only major change that can be read between the lines of the diary was the disappearance of landlords and the distribution of landed property among peasants. This distribution, however, took place spontaneously and without much bloodshed.

The situation changed with the arrival of the Russian Bolsheviks. Looting and requisitioning of peasant property became a daily reality. Where the Bolsheviks encountered resistance, they resorted

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13 Leonid Heretz, *Russia on the Eve of Modernity: Popular Religion and Traditional Culture Under the Last Tsars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

to mass terror and the principle of collective responsibility. Sambursky quotes a statement from the Chernihiv secret police (Cheka) in July 1919, that for every Red Army soldier or Bolshevik killed, 100 locals would be shot.

Sambursky's description of the Bolshevik regime confirms another conclusion of historical research: terror was not a marginal but a central element of Bolshevik policy. Without it, they would have had no chance of establishing their power. When, in 1917, after the collapse of the Russian Empire, but before the Bolshevik coup d'état, when peasants had the chance to vote freely for the first, and last, time, they voted not for the Bolsheviks, but for Ukrainian socialist parties that formed the backbone of the UNR and which the Bolsheviks called, after the name of its leader, Symon Petliura, "Petliurite."

Terror was used by all regimes that tried to establish their rule in Ukrainian lands. But their terror tended to be unsystematic. Bolshevik terror was methodical and exceeded in its scope and intensity all others. In his memoirs, Sambursky recounts a typical episode: when the White Army briefly entered Huzhivka, they surprised the locals by asking permission before entering peasant households and paying money for what they took for their own needs. This was in stark contrast to the behaviour of the Bolsheviks, who confiscated peasant property without permission or compensation.

The diary entries leave no doubt about the attitude of the residents to the Bolshevik government: it was alien to them. It was alien because the Bolsheviks spoke Russian and included many Jews among the Chekists. Anti-Russian sentiment went hand in hand with anti-Semitism, although there was little evidence of it in the Huzhivka region because so few Jews lived there.

The villagers did not know the word "colony". But the words they use to describe the Bolshevik government fit the description of colonial rule. They were convinced that all their looted and requisitioned property was going to Russia. This inevitably made them think in national terms. In their view, Bolshevik violence would end if Ukraine could separate from Russia and live its own political life. Sambursky quotes relevant statements from local peasants at length. He also presents a conversation with Bolshevik officers,

wherein he tried to convince them that Ukraine could exist separately from Russia and be as rich and cultured as Belgium. He hears in response: "We will not allow such a thing."

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, interpreted resistance to their rule as national. For them, Huzhivka and neighbouring villages were "Petliura's land." They established their power by mass terror, but thereafter used more peaceful, piecemeal tactics to retain control. They gradually increased taxes, restricted religious practices, and confiscated weapons in order to prevent violent outbursts of mass resistance. To break peasant solidarity, they tried to split the local community. To this end, they exacerbated conflicts in the community, which were weak before, especially after the expulsion of the landlords, by introducing divisions between kin groups and families that did not exist before. Specifically, they divided peasants into three categories: kulaks (the rich), middle, poor, and incited hostility towards the kulaks.

The Bolsheviks presented themselves as the party of the industrial proletariat. This made some sense in the Russian ethnic core of the former Russian Empire, which had large industries and concentrations of industrial workers. Ukraine was largely agrarian. Therefore, in Huzhivka, as in other Ukrainian villages, the Bolsheviks relied not on the industrial proletariat but the rural lumpenproletariat. They also had some appeal among the younger generation, which was more open to Bolshevik and anti-religious propaganda. However, as Sambursky's entries show, the impact of the propaganda was limited. Young people's attitudes wavered depending on time and circumstances. Initially, they supported national slogans, and later switched to Bolshevik positions, but did not stop thinking about an independent Ukraine.

This volatility of attitudes was largely because national consciousness was not institutionally rooted. The only local national institutions, village reading clubs [*Prosvita*], and cooperatives, were systematically destroyed by the Bolsheviks. For the Bolsheviks, these institutions were a "state within a state" and had to be destroyed as dangerous alternatives to their power.

The Bolsheviks succeeded in taking power by atomising society and breaking old ties. Sambursky illustrates this by describing the decline of annual Christmas traditions, especially carolling.

What had been a festive period of joy became a time of doom and gloom. Another example of social degeneration was the massive spread of theft. Traditional society did not tolerate thieves, less so because of moral reasons than because it was a threat to survival for peasant families. Under Soviet rule, theft became a new social norm.

Another Soviet norm was the double standard. The Bolsheviks failed to break the old traditions completely. The latter continued to exist in private spaces, while in public, peasants demonstrated loyalty to the authorities. This duality of norms, albeit of a different character, was evident among lower village officials. Publicly, they were loyal, but privately, they were guided not by Bolshevik ideals, but by material gain for themselves and their families.

For those like me, who were born in the Soviet Union, those social norms look very familiar. Those features characterised Soviet rule until the very end of its existence. For sure, the regime evolved. The biggest changes occurred after Stalin's death, when state terror was eased, and local Ukrainian elites were elevated to the status of major partners in the governance of the Soviet Union, provided they abandoned national ambitions. However, the main features of Soviet power in Ukraine, the repressive apparatus as the main condition for its existence, the state policy of atheism, the duality of social norms, corruption (the notorious *blat*), and an atomised society, remained the same.

Two world wars and Soviet modernisation destroyed the traditional culture of the Ukrainian village. Ukrainian society ceased to be predominantly rural. Since the 1960s, most Ukrainians have lived in cities. This profound transformation had to happen, as it did everywhere else on the European continent, with or without communist rule. But unlike the French or peasants in other countries, Ukrainian villagers were stopped short in their transformation “from peasants into a nation”. The turning point was collectivisation and the Holodomor of 1932–1933, the greatest tragedy of the Ukrainian countryside that finally broke the back of the Ukrainian peasantry.

It was part of the great Bolshevik experiment to create a new historical community, the “Soviet people”. If we put aside the official communist rhetoric, there was nothing fundamentally new

about this community. It was a rather typical civil nation, i.e. a multi-ethnic community whose main criterion for belonging was loyalty to the state. But it was a civil nation without citizens. Citizenship implies independent civic engagement and the free exercise of one's political rights. None of this existed in the Soviet Union. Suffice to say that until the early 1970s, the rural population did not have passports and were deprived of the right to leave their collective farms.

Officially, the 'Soviet nation' was supposed to be based on the equality of all cultures and languages. In reality, social mobility was dependent on using the Russian language. In Soviet Ukraine, Ukrainian thus became the language of the least skilled and lowest social group, primarily residents of Ukrainian villages.<sup>14</sup> Selective censorship, meanwhile, effectively erased national memory. In Soviet Ukraine, this policy took on extreme forms.

In a way, Sambursky's fate, and the fate of his collection, reflect the history of the Ukrainian countryside in the 20th century. His diaries were confiscated by the authorities in the late 1920s, who then destroyed his museum in the early 1930s. His house was demolished in the early 1970s, and no one remembers his burial place today. If the Soviet project had lasted longer, Ukrainians as a separate nation might have well disappeared from the world map altogether. Milan Kundera wrote about this in the early 1980s in his famous essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe." In the fate of Ukrainians, he foresaw a warning for Czechs, Hungarians, Slovaks, and other peoples under communist rule.<sup>15</sup>

That did not happen. The regime was quite effective in erasing much of the collective memory of Ukrainians. That memory, however, remained functioning at the family level. This was evidenced, for example, by the quick public revival of the memory of the 1933 Famine (Holodomor) in independent Ukraine, although any mention of it was banned in the USSR. Many Ukrainians, including those in the russified south and east of Ukraine, remembered it personally or knew about it from family stories. The same was true of

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14 Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1985).

15 Milan Kundera, "The Tragedy of Central Europe," *New York Review of Books*, 31, no. 7 (1984) 33-38.

the history of the anti-Bolshevik peasant movement. A characteristic detail: the compiler of Sambursky's diaries, Viktor Morenets, heard about the existence of "Petliura gangs" in the mid-1970s when he headed a local history club at a local school, and since then, he has been collecting information about his countrymen who served in the UNR army.

The publication of Kostyantyn Sambursky's diary entries in 2015 should be viewed as part of a broader project to form historical national memory in an independent state. This publication was not commissioned by the state, but was a result of an authentic civic initiative from below. Velychenko compares this diary to Victor Klemperer's diary *I Shall Bear Witness*. I think he is right. Just as Klemperer's writings are a kind of anatomy of the Nazi regime, so too Sambursky's diaries are an anatomy of Bolshevik rule. Fortunately, the Nazi regime was short-lived, so we do not know what features it would have acquired in the future. Sambursky's diary entries show that many of the innate features of the Soviet regime introduced by the Bolsheviks persisted until its demise.

Moreover, recent surveys of public attitudes in Ukrainian lands currently occupied by Russians reveal features described by Sambursky a century before. In both cases, we see the same destruction of public trust, atomisation of society, and piecemeal assimilation. More strikingly, very much like the villagers of Huzhivka, Ukrainians under Russian occupation today use the local dialect (*surzhyk*) to distinguish themselves from Russians.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, Sambursky's diaries are not just a document of the past. They offer a better understanding of the present, and, as long as Russia does not abandon its aggressive imperial politics, serve as a warning for the future.

Yaroslav Hrytsak  
Ukrainian Catholic University

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16 Оксана Міхеєва, «Окупація як процес і соціальний порядок (досвіди окупованих в Херсонській та Запорізькій областях)», *Україна модерна*, 30.07.2025, <https://uamoderna.com/war/okupatsiia-iak-protses-i-sotsialnyi-poriadok-dosvidy-okupovanykh-v-khersonskii-ta-zaporizkii-oblastiakh/>.



## Introduction

“As a rule I make entries daily in the diary. I see or hear something—I make an entry. Something new happens or I see movement on the street—again I enter it. Thus, everyday, sequentially I enter everything seen. Someone comes and tells me something—again I make an entry if it is true [*virne*]. I always go to the volost centre and what I hear and see there, enter it with a pencil into the diary in a small notebook. I tell no one about my diaries.”  
(Sambursky, *Shchodennyky*, 80)

This book reviews the conditions of rural life in Ukraine under Bolshevik rule between 1918 and 1928, based on a diary that stands out from among the very few known works of this genre. This diary provides a detailed account of daily events for almost 30 years in one village: Huzhivka in Chernihiv province. The author recorded his experiences daily. Although he travelled to Kyiv, Kharkiv and Chernihiv, his focus is on Huzhivka and settlements in an approximate 35-mile radius around it. Entries provide details about his education, work, neighbours and life in nearby surrounding settlements, together with asides, sometimes several pages long, on the history of nearby villages. The diary provides a valuable listing of prices over ten years, and occasional detailed descriptions of religious festivals and customs. It describes the comings and goings of rival armies, confiscations, requisitions, the activities of the local officials, the role of the church in local affairs, personal rivalries, and how land re-allocation occurred in this settlement of approximately 3000 people. The diary provides invaluable insight into the human element of rural revolutionary Ukraine. It dwells on topics until recently understandably glossed over or not mentioned at all in the historiography of the revolutionary decade.

Kostiantyn Sambursky (1867–1934) began his diary in 1905. As of 1919, he carried a notebook with him on all his travels, wherein he recorded what he witnessed as soon as he could. He wrote in ungrammatical Russian. In 1920, the secret police (Cheka—ChK) confiscated the volumes that covered the years up to November 1918 and secreted them somewhere in Kharkiv. He tried to retrieve them but failed. Other materials Sambursky wrote were confiscated in 1930, and whose whereabouts are unknown, were a history of Huzhivka he had written in 1902, a collection of ethnographic and

etymological materials, and a diary-notebook covering the years 1929–30. The editors discovered the unconfiscated volumes after 1991, translated them into Ukrainian and published them in 2015. The publication includes an autobiography, Sambursky's 1919 inventory of his house-museum collection, and previously unpublished photographs, including some of the persons mentioned in the text.<sup>1</sup> It includes the only known photo of Sambursky, standing beside his house. It was taken from a distance, so his face is hardly visible.

This published diary provides a source of information that, unlike memoirs, was written on the spot at the time. It is the only one of its kind for all of Ukraine to include so much detail for such a long period of time, about a rural region distant from major centres of political power. It is an eyewitness account about village life by a man who lived until his death on the territory he wrote about, and which focuses on that territory. It provides particularly valuable information about the years 1918–23, when illiteracy was no bar to office, and little about village life was recorded. An unknown number of written governmental and non-governmental documents were lost or destroyed. Few locals knew how to keep records. Village secretaries were often returned soldiers who had learned about administration, reading and writing in the army.

Sambursky was a commoner son of a priest born in the village of Bezahulivka near Nizhyn. He was educated in and later taught in Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) schools, finished a course in theology, considered becoming a priest, but never took orders. He later moved to, and until his death, lived in Huzhivka, where he was a deacon and psalmist in the church, which belonged to the ROC. Sambursky's formative years were in the 1880s, when a significant number of educated Ukrainians involved themselves with scholarship about their provinces. At the imperial level, that decade saw distinct anti-terrorist sentiment among the educated in reaction to

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1 V. Balabai, "Kostiantyn Ivanovych Sambursky, zabutyi kraieznavets," in V. Morenets, V. Shevchenko eds., *Kostiantyn Sambursky. Shchodennyky 1918-1928 rr.* (Kyiv, 2015). Hereafter cited as Sambursky. Sambursky, 6-12. His 1927 catalogue: 955-984. The published volume contains 13 shorter articles and published documents relating to Chernihiv province.

the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, and the popularity of conservative Slavophilism under Alexander III. During that decade, Sambursky became an enthusiastic student of Ukrainian history and ethnography. He belonged to several provincial and imperial scholarly associations, and from 1919 until 1923(?), worked for the provincial branch of the Commissariat of Education. Before the war, he had standing subscriptions to newspapers and academic journals. He was not directly involved with any of the major political events or organisations of the time. He befriended leading Ukrainian and Russian academics, and he created a museum in his house containing items from the Stone Age through to the twentieth century that was visited by hundreds of people from far and wide. Thanks to his position and initiative, he avoided being dispossessed and was able to maintain his dwelling properly after 1919. He was responsible for saving hundreds of items from destroyed manor houses in 1917–28. Of the two male relatives he mentions in his diary, one was an officer in the White Army, the other in the Red Army.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of tsarist society, he was an educated white-collar professional typical of the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of socially mobile bi-lingual Ukrainians born during the latter half of the nineteenth century, after serfdom was abolished and industrialisation and urbanisation began. He was a village-born, urban-educated, bilingual Ukrainian. As far as can be determined from the 1897 census, by the turn of the century, there were at least two million such literate Ukrainian speakers between the ages of nine and 60, who could do white-collar jobs. This total would be higher if we added to it the unknown number of those who knew Ukrainian but declared themselves Russian.<sup>3</sup> In 1906, when the government allowed teachers to use Ukrainian when necessary to explain lessons, some used this loophole to teach as much in Ukrain-

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- 2 The surname Sambursky appeared often in nineteenth-century Chernihiv province registers and was shared by Jewish and Christian families. Kostiantyn's Jewish namesake and contemporary Menachem, emigrated to Königsberg and also kept a diary wherein he included the history of his family.
  - 3 S. Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine. A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats 1917-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010) 17-19.