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Richard Meehan Renoff (b. March 2, 1935-d. Westbury, Long Island, April 4, 2015): An Appreciation

The first stirrings of a Carpatho-Rusyn (Ruthenian) cultural revival in America began in the early 1970s. It is fair to say that sociologist Richard Renoff was among its first heralds and remained one of its most stalwart supporters. He defended his still as yet unpublished doctoral dissertation on “the loss of community among the Carpatho-Rusyns” at New York University’s Department of Sociology in 1971. In many respects, Richard’s professional interests were shaped by the circumstances of his birth, education, and the ethnic and minority social politics that prevailed during the period of his early career.

Richard was born on March 2, 1936 in Danbury, Connecticut to the family of Michael J. Renoff (1895–1959) and Helen Dorothy (born Meehan, 1904–1985). Richard’s father Michael, who arrived in the United States in 1902, was born in the Carpatho-Rusyn village of Vel’ká Poľana (Hungarian: Nagypolány), in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, present-day the Slovak Republic. It was Richard’s paternal grandfather, Petro Hrivniak (1866–1909?), however, who first immigrated to the United States (1895?) and “Americanized” the family name to Renoff. Richard’s sole younger sibling, Michael Kenneth, died in 2016.

Richard graduated from Fairfield Preparatory School, a Jesuit educational institution, in 1953. While in preparatory school he evinced an interest in the Latin, history, and competitive sports. In 1957 he received a B.S. from Danbury State College (now Western Connecticut State) and six years later (1963) was awarded an M.A. from Fordham University for his thesis entitled “The Conversion of American Negroes to Roman Catholicism: Some Types of Conversion Processes” (*NAACP*). The preparation of his thesis was supported by the Frank Vatterott Scholarship in Minority Group Studies.

Richard embarked on a college teaching career while still in graduate school, first at Sienna College’s Department of Sociology in Loudonville, New York in 1961, and two years at another Roman Catholic educational institution, the College of Mount St. Vincent in Riverdale, New York (*Sienna Names Six Men to Faculty; A Liberal Surge*). In 1967 he joined the faculty at Nassau County Community College, Garden City, Long Island, retiring thirty-six years later in 2013.

Inspired by his own ethnic origins, Richard participated in a groundbreaking seminar on Carpatho-Rusyns held at Harvard University in 1974. He also transcribed, edited, and annotated (with Stephen Reynolds) its *Proceedings*. The next year, he participated in a two-day seminar on Carpatho-Rusyns at the Basilian Sisters Convent of Mount St. Macrina near Uniontown, Pennsylvania (*Seminar at Mt. Macrina* (a); *Seminar at Mt. Macrina* (b)). He continued his interest in Carpatho-Rusyns and published several research articles in “Diakonia” and smaller pieces in the quarterly magazine “Carpatho-Rusyn American”. In the mid-1990s, Richard was among a group of scholars who worked on a survey of holdings of the Episcopal and Heritage Institute Museum and Library of the Byzantine Catholic Diocese in West Patterson, New Jersey which resulted in several printed descriptions (Karlwich, vi). His survey of commemorative and jubilee books held there led to a microfilming project with a set of microfilms deposited at the New York Public Library. At that time, he also participated in a seminar and reception honoring the creator of the Episcopal and Heritage Institute Museum and Library, Bishop Michael J. Dudick (1916–2007).

As the bibliography below demonstrates, in addition to researching Carpatho-Rusyns and their churches, both Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox, Richard was also interested in Italian Americans, ethnic minorities, and the sociology of American sports.

Richard’s friends and colleagues recall him well as a warm individual and energetic scholar who engaged enthusiastically with them in several projects,

publications, academic presentations, and seminars. He was attentive to what needed to be researched and threw himself wholeheartedly into his work. He will be fondly remembered by his colleagues writing this tribute especially for his numerous and significant scholarly contributions to Carpatho-Rusyn Studies, a field he himself helped to initiate in the United States.

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