

THE INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL STUDY

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NEWSLETTER

The 862 Project — Whose Beginning? by Richard Robbins

History is bunk, no doubt, but we sure love to fight about it. We especially like to argue about how things began, as the many school-board screams and grunts about America's beginnings—was it 1619 or 1776 ??—plainly show. But here these disputes don't produce much more than a few parking lot dust-ups and clumsy attempts at legislation to suppress discussion. Despite the huffings and puffings of certain US politicians about various "projects," one wonders just how much they really know or care about their country's past.

Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, is someone who takes his History VERY seriously, prepared to back up his views about the past with tanks, rockets, and boots on the ground. The current war in Ukraine has many causes, but not the least of them is Putin's assertion that all East Slavic peoples properly belong in the bosom of Russia and that Ukrainians have no valid claim to nationhood or to a state of their own. Putin's historical "project" follows in general terms the line laid down by N.M. Karamzin (ca 1766-1826), modern Russia's first great historian. That path begins with *Rus'*, the collection of East Slavic principalities whose chief city was Kiev (Kyiv) and whose rulers (*kniazy*) were members of a large dynasty descended from the quasi-mythical Riurik, a Viking "invited" in 862 to rule the Slavs and other peoples living along the river routes from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Converted from paganism by Prince (later Saint)Vladimir (Volodymyr) of Kiev(Kyiv) in the 10th century, these principalities, although often in conflict, shared a common language, the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, and an elite culture strongly influenced by Byzantium.

In the 13th century, *Rus'* was shattered by the Mongol (Tatar) invasions. Its tenuous unity was destroyed and, in the Karamzinian (and Putinian) version of things, the center of Russian history shifted north and eastward, away from Kiev (destroyed in 1240) to the lands of Vladimir-Suzdal. This area included the statelet of Moscow which soon began a steady rise aided by the Mongols who saw its princes as useful bagmen and allies. By the end of the 14th century, Muscovy became increasingly independent and began to pursue a policy often called "the gathering of the Russian lands," laying claim to the legacy of Kiev. A century later, Moscow had thrown off the "Mongol yoke," was fully sovereign, and had conquered (gathered) most of the principalities in the northeastern region of the former *Rus'*. This "gathering" continued through five centuries under strong rulers: Ivan "the Terrible," Aleksei Mikhailovich, Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, and Alexander I, and culminated with Stalin. In the process, Moscovia became in turn the Rossiiskaia Imperiia, the USSR, and the Rossiiskaia Federatsiia. Russia's story becomes a kind of *translatio* of *Rus'* from Kiev, "the mother of Russian cities," to Moscow, to St. Petersburg, and back to Moscow. This is a "History of the Russian **State**" (Istoriia **gosudarstva** rossiiskogo), an empire that swallows nations and peoples.

This "project" is not the only one with legitimacy, however. Another, Ukrainian, trajectory begins with Kyiv to be sure, but then takes a different course. After their initial depredations, the Mongol "yoke" on most of the southern and western principalities of *Rus'* did not last long. These lands fell increasingly under the dominance of Lithuania, which by the middle of the 14th century extended from the Baltic to the Black Sea and embraced Kyiv itself. The polity that emerged has been called the Lithuanian-Russian

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Once again, members have come forth with generous donations, added to their dues or sent in memory of deceased colleagues. These donations help keep the organization strong and able year after year to present mini-grants for members’ research projects as well as the occasional public program in coordination with other groups. Thank you!! I also want to thank all of our board members for their dedication, our monthly program presenters for sharing their knowledge, and the writers who submit material for the newsletter. If others can also step up to do any of those things, please let me know!

The following statement about history seems apt in this moment. It’s by William Falk, editor-in-chief of *The Week*, a magazine I recommend for brief synopses of multiple viewpoints on each week’s news. (From the April 8, 2022 issue.)

“It’s 1918 again, and the greatest risk the West faces is not a third world war but appeasement in the face of Vladimir Putin’s aggression in Ukraine. No, it’s 1964 or 2003, and the U.S. must not again make the mistake of being stampeded into a foolish war like Vietnam or Iraq. Actually, it’s 1995, and ousting Putin as we did Muammar Qaddafi may lead to chaos and dire unintended consequences. Take your pick. Human beings are wired to make comparisons, and in deciding how to best respond to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, it’s natural to fall back on historical analogies. But which moment in history is most relevant? That’s tricky business. The choice generally reflects the prior biases and agenda of the chooser, and can thus serve to mislead rather than to illuminate.

“Ukraine’s Volodymyr Zelensky, a canny communicator, has been a font of historical analogies. In trying to rally the Western world to do more to aid his country’s defense, he evoked the Battle of Britain in a speech to the U.K.’s House of Commons and echoed Winston Churchill’s “we shall never surrender” speech. To the U.S. Congress, Zelensky summoned up Pearl Harbor and 9/11. To Israel’s Knesset, he spoke of Putin’s “final solution” —and the extermination of the Ukrainian people. Putin also has evoked World War II in justifying his barbaric assault, telling Russians their soldiers are engaged in a “denazification” program. It is, of course, not 1938, 1964, or 2003, and while the past can inform the present, it cannot tell us with any certainty how to deter or defeat Putin, who, not incidentally, has 6,000 more nuclear weapons than Hitler did. The only clear lesson of history is that 10 or 20 years from now, a sage analyst will declare that some future conflict is “another Ukraine.” — *Ann Harlow*

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MONTHLY PROGRAMS

“Beyond Genealogy: Tips and Techniques for Researching and Presenting Family History Online”

On January 16, **Jim Gasperini**—the Institute’s webmaster and general tech guru—showed us the website he has created for the history of his ancestors on his mother’s side, “The Colburn Chronicles.”* Besides illustrating it with family photographs including tintypes and an albrotpe he had found on eBay, he fleshed out the narrative with many maps and images that directly or indirectly related to the story. He divided the material into chapters for each generation. *(<http://www.clubmobile.org/Colburns/Introduction.html>)

Besides a personal interest in his family history, Jim had a professional reason for the project. As a User Experience (UX) designer, he wanted to learn about a new (at the time) technique called responsive design. He built the site in Dreamweaver using a code base called Foundation. One trick he learned is to use a ready-made “lazy loading” script that allows for gradual loading of the images on a single page without forcing users to wait for them all to appear before they start reading the page. (Jim offered that if anyone would be interested, he could annotate a page or two of his design that could be used as a template.)

Techie that he is, Jim had hoped to switch back and forth in his talk between PowerPoint slides and the website, but that proved unwieldy in Zoom. Nevertheless, as he took us through his family history we learned about colonial-era Dedham, Massachusetts and two towns in western New York where some Colburns migrated after the Revolutionary War. The “Chronicles” feature stories of wonderful finds as well as dead ends and the need to fact-check some earlier family stories and genealogies.

Jim mentioned a number of sources for family history research, including US census records,

ship passenger lists, town histories and records, church records, privately published family histories and biographies, county atlases listing land owners, cemetery records, and unofficial records such as findagrave.com. Many of these can be found online in such collections as the Internet Archive, MyHeritage.com, and ancestry.com. Curious about his great-grandfather’s stock farm, Jim found information about his prize-winning French Canadian cows in the *Breeder’s Gazette* magazine and in newspaper articles. He noted that the genealogies you might find online are not always accurate; often a bias toward identifying royal or aristocratic ancestors has led to mistakes.

The discussion that followed included compliments on Jim’s extensive family history site and laments by some that they didn’t think they would ever be able to find nearly as much information about their own ancestors.

– *Ann Harlow*

“George Daniel de Monfreid: Post-Impressionist Trailblazer and Gauguin’s Best Friend”

Laure Latham spoke to us from London on February 20 about her great-great-grandfather, the French artist George Daniel de Monfreid (1856-1929). She had co-authored with her father the first biography of Monfreid (2017). A second edition will come out soon in connection with a major Monfreid retrospective this summer in Perpignan, France. Since I am very interested in artists of that period, I volunteered to take notes and write this report.

Laure summarized and illustrated the artist’s life. As she said, “fortunately for him, he failed his baccalauréat,” forcing him to enroll in l’Académie Julian rather than the prestigious but conservative Ecole des Beaux-Arts. There he was encouraged to pursue his individual vision.

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He was enrolled there from 1876 to 1919! By the late 1880s, the school included the group called Les Nabis as well as Gauguin, Van Gogh, and other Post-Impressionists. Monfreid's paintings from that time show him experimenting with the color dots of divisionism, or pointillism.

Monfreid met Gauguin in 1887 and wrote in his diary, "I was as strongly disconcerted by the art emanating from his paintings as by the conversations with this extraordinary man." They immediately became friends. In 1889 Gauguin invited Monfreid to exhibit in a kind of "salon des refusés" at the Café Volpini just outside the Exposition Universelle.

Monfreid spent several summers in a tiny seaside village in southwest France, La Franqui, where he met and married his first wife, Laure's great-great-grandmother. His mother had a home not far away in the Pyrenees. He enjoyed sailing, mountain climbing and long bicycle trips. By the late 1890s he was part of a "Catalan School" of artists. He also painted with Matisse in Coullioure.

"Daniel de Monfreid was the man who made what little ease and comfort Gauguin ever had in the South Seas, possible. He was his friend, his banker, and his counselor. He interviewed dealers, dunned creditors, sold his friend's pictures and exhibited them in his own studio; ran errands for him, provided him with everything, from artists' materials to flower seeds and shoes and strings for his mandolin. And without his help Gauguin's life in the South Seas could barely have lasted out a year."

Laure noted that although Monfreid was known as a friend of Gauguin, his fame was largely overshadowed for years by the unusual life of his son Henry, an adventurer, smuggler, and prolific author who lived in Ethiopia, converted to Islam, and became addicted to hashish and opium. Interesting family! Not to mention that

George Daniel de Monfreid was apparently the illegitimate son of either Leopold II of Belgium or Gideon Reed of Tiffany & Co.

– *Ann Harlow*

"Matera and the Sassi: From National Shame to International Fame"

On March 20, Marilyn Geary gave a fascinating presentation about one of the oldest continuously inhabited places in the world: Matera, a town in the Basilicata region of southeastern Italy famous for its limestone caves. She became aware of the town when a colleague at the Italian agency where she worked mentioned that his Italian relatives lived in caves. She had to go check it out.

Conquered and reconquered by many invaders over the centuries, the area sits on many layers of history. Soft, porous limestone facilitated the creation of caves, which at one point included approximately 1500 dwellings housing about 16,000 people. Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts have been found in these caves. Unfortunately rumors that King Frederick Barbarossa hid treasure in them led locals to dig extensively over the years, disrupting the archaeological evidence.

Starting in the 800s CE, monks fleeing the iconoclastic practices of the Byzantine church built around 150 churches and monasteries hidden inside the Sassi, as the rock formations are called, where they could paint their icons in peace. Many of these have been rediscovered in recent decades and preserved. In this very dry part of the world a unique water-harvesting system developed. Moisture forming on bowls of stones collects in underground cisterns. Some of these were quite big, the largest holding five million liters of water, connected by systems of small canals.

People began repurposing some of the larger caves and cisterns, turning them into houses,

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storerooms, and work spaces. Some of the modifications were just wooden doors erected on the mouth of a cave, others more elaborate. The ceilings of some dwellings were the floors of others. The town grew briefly wealthy in the 1700s, a hub between east and west. Impressive buildings still remain from that period along the main piazza of the town, just above the caves. As the wealthy moved up to al Piano (the plain), as the surface town is known, the cave dwellings below became the overcrowded, unhygienic habitation of the poor. Infant mortality reached 40 percent. In the 1930s, under the Fascist government of Benito Mussolini, what may have been well-intentioned reforms made matters worse. Roads destroyed the ancient water-gathering system without replacing it with anything better.

Carlo Levi, a Torinese anti-Fascist writer and artist living in exile in nearby Aliano found the conditions of poverty he encountered shocking. He wrote the influential book *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (meaning that the area south of Napoli is so godforsaken that even Christ is absent). It became an international best-seller. Politicians visited and debated what to do about the situation in the Mezzogiorno (the Italian south). In 1952 a program was begun to forcibly remove the 16,000 people living in the Sassi and place them in new housing in the suburbs of Matera. These changes had mixed success; residents tried to recreate the close-knit community which they had loved about life in the Sassi despite the undoubted poverty.

With the people removed and the caves boarded up, the Sassi began to deteriorate. A group of activist young people objected, refusing to let 100 years of neglect destroy 9000 years of history. They uncovered the “Crypt of the Original Sin,” where beautiful frescoes had survived despite 1000 years of use by shepherds. It is now called the Sistine Chapel of rock-hewn churches. Architect Pietro Laureano demonstrated how the caves could be preserved by

creating a model cave dwelling with modern conveniences for his family. He also researched and drew attention to the unique value of the ancient water harvesting system. His work led to the Sassi and its Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera being selected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Many movies on Biblical subjects have since been filmed there.

Today the caves are a living, thriving place, with B & Bs offering rooms decorated with frescoes painted a thousand years ago. A different demographic of educated professionals is now moving into newly-gentrified caves. A Museum-Workshop of the Peasant Culture recreates for tourists the ways of the former class of troglodytes.

A lively discussion afterward touched on the role of brigands resisting Italian unification in the south, particulars of the involvement of Carlo Levi, and why it was that politicians were so shocked by the conditions Levi brought to light. Conditions in the south were just not on the radar of politicians from the north, Marilyn explained, due in part to racism. The saying “everything south of Rome is Africa” sums up a common northern attitude.

Thanks to Marilyn for a well researched, entertaining, and enlightening presentation.

– *Jim Gasperini*

Institute Videos

We now have 14 videos of Institute programs, **Ann Harlow** reports. Those that I made public have generally only been viewed a few times, but guest speaker Jonathan Marshall’s talk “Organized Crime, Big Business, and the Corruption of US Democracy” has been accessed 234 times! Peter Stansky’s talk on George Orwell attracted 33 visits.

At the April board meeting, we discussed whether we really want our informal discussions made public. Since we didn’t have permission

from the audience members who appear in the videos, we decided to switch them all to “unlisted” status, in which only those who have the link can access them. However, as soon as I have time, I plan to edit out the discussion part of each so that the presentation itself can be made public again—if the speaker wishes it to be. If you were one of the speakers and would like yours to remain unlisted, please email me* and I won’t bother with that step. You can also ask me for the link to your talk if you don’t already have it. *(ann@annharlow.com or whatever other address you have for me)

There are various advantages of having monthly presentations available to the public, including increasing both the presenters’ and Institute’s visibility and, of course, sharing knowledge. Little did we know when the Covid pandemic started that we would be adding this service to our offerings. I would love to hear from any members who know how to edit videos and would like to help with this project!

Writers Group Report

I can’t remember if the stock market went up or down this past quarter, but in the last three months things have been bullish for the Writers Group.

In January **Jim Gasperini** got us off to a splendid start with another chapter in his work “A Fire in the Mind.” This segment, titled “The Animal with Fire,” concentrated on mankind’s discovery, employment, and mastery of fire. Of particular interest were the parts that covered the interaction between humans and fire and the way that it changed how we dressed, ate, socialized, and thought. Jim’s work, the group agreed, goes from strength to strength. We look forward to its completion and publication.

If Jim’s work on fire probed human beginnings, **Dan Kohanski’s** February contribution

considered human endings. In what will be the penultimate chapter of his book, now titled “Inventing God,” Dan presented “The World Will End [Fill in the Blank].” Dan explored the Christian conception of the final chapter of the human story, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s plan, complete with a Last Judgment. Dan argues that this finale, however conceived, is crucial to the Christian faith, for without it there would be no need to turn to Jesus. He skillfully traced the way Christian views about the end of things has evolved and how it continues to impact our lives and thought. Dan’s chapter provoked a lively discussion, and the general feeling of the group is that the work should move ahead to publication (before the world ends).

In March **Cathy Robbins** presented a substantially revised opening chapter of her work “A Torrid Splendor: Finding Calabria.” In this chapter and in the larger work, Cathy seeks to blend family story, regional history, and contemporary events. Finding the correct balance has never been easy and has prompted frequent reconsiderations and rewriting. But the group was very favorably impressed with what Cathy has produced and believed that it augers well for the portions that lie ahead.

– **Rob Robbins**

Member News

Peter Meyerhof received the Campbell Augustus Menefee Scholastic Award from the Sonoma County Historical Society “in recognition for his many significant historical research projects and presentations about Sonoma County history.”

Carol Sicherman was invited to blurb *Politics, Democratization and Academia in Uganda: The Case of Makerere University* (2021), an impressive analysis of efforts by academics to intervene in politics.

MEMBER NEWS

The Martinez Historical Society initiated displays featuring ethnic and religious celebrations. The first exhibit was about Chinese New Year, **Oliver Pollak** writes. “Karen and I offered to do Passover. So we curated our Jewish experience for a wider audience. Our accumulation of Haggadahs, empty matzo boxes, Passover cookbooks, and Seder plates came in handy as did our shelf-life-expired jar of gefilte fish. We wrote the four-page handout, ‘Matzo in Martinez in 1878 and Passover at Camp Stoneman 1943.’”

On March 25 **Bert Gordon** presented a paper, “Music, Power, and Tourism: Occupied France during the Second World War,” at the Tourism and Musical Imaginaries 2022 Conference, at the University of California Berkeley. Bert is also teaching an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute course at UC Berkeley: “The History of France: From Roman Gaul to the Present,” March 28 through May 16.

Margaretta (Gretta) Mitchell’s latest book is called *Dreamscapes and Destinations*. “This book was hatched in 2020, the first year of the pandemic. Since travel was out of the question, I turned to pictures to return to various destinations, some of which live in my memory as dreamscapes — beginning with the Ancient Stone Circles in England and ending with the vast space of Death Valley, California.” Each geographical section includes brief anecdotal introductions to the 93 black and white images. Gretta has produced three “legacy” books: *Iconographies* (2015), *Island Dreams* (2017) and *Secret Garden* (2020) published by her imprint, Elysian Editions. Institute members have a \$10 discount on book purchases: \$30 will cover tax and shipping. Please send checks to: Margaretta Mitchell, 280 Hillcrest Road, Berkeley, CA 94705.

HISTORY REMEMBERED

Kevin Knauss’ latest book, *Amos P. Catlin, The Whig Who Put Sacramento On The Map*, is now available. See Kevin’s post “about the book and Catlin’s life, including a YouTube video where I visit different places where Amos lived and worked.” (<https://insuremekevin.com/amos-catlin-from-mormon-island-mining-to-sacramento-judge/>)

A New Feature for the Newsletter

A recent comment on an NPR radio program to the effect that people born in the last decade of the 20th century and later knew nothing of the Cold War period got me thinking. I remember the thawing of that era in the late 1980s and 1990s. From this I realized that Institute members, primarily of middle and later age, were likely a gold mine of historical memory. An asset, not a liability, as some have worried. With this issue I want to introduce “history remembered,” personal accounts by Institute members of their experiences during particular times. We’ll begin with the short “chapters” dictated to me by our late colleague Bogna Lorence-Kot of her memories of World War II.

These dictations were the first step in writing a memoir. She intended to follow up with research. During one of our afternoon sessions, I suggested to Bogna that she might start her research online to track the back story to her and her mother’s wartime sojourn in Africa. (I think using the internet for serious research was new to her.) I hadn’t a clue what she might find, but certainly it was the logical place to start. Ill health prevented Bogna from taking this step. In preparing to include her early chapters here, I spent several hours myself “googling” Poland and Britain; Polish exiles; refugee camps in Africa, etc. Bogna would have been overjoyed with the results.

HISTORY REMEMBERED

Bogna was six years old when Hitler invaded her homeland of Poland. She and her parents were living in Romania. My mother intended to fly with me from Bucharest to Warsaw, however there was no room on the flight. That was on August 31, 1939. The next day the Germans marched into Poland. My father, who worked for the Polish airlines (LOT), had been sent to Bucharest when I was 6 months old. He was an airplane mechanic—something he had learned in National Service. In early September when all ordinary traffic at the airport had been prohibited by the Romanian authorities and Romanian guards had been posted to enforce the prohibition, a high-ranking LOT official asked my father to prepare an airplane for departure and to take responsibility for doing that, which he did, and managed to do it by explaining to the Romanian guards that this was just a test flight. The proposed flight consisted of orders from the Polish government to Warsaw authorities to surrender to the Germans. The order was initiated by the Polish government which was outside of Poland and in the area of Romania. Once the airplane took off, the guards grasped that this was no test flight and so started shooting at the plane, but missed. My father was arrested.

I think this is part of my own memory that we visited my father in jail, on the outskirts of Bucharest, seeing my father scratching [himself] and my mother upset at that sight. Eventually he was transferred to the city jail, and the transactions to buy my father out were moving along, as witnessed by the fact that my mother used me to pass and receive notes from a jail trustee. Much has been said subsequently about the adroitness with which I performed my task of exchanging messages. Fortunately, the airlines paid off the appropriate officials to get my father out of jail. My mother burned all his clothes when he came home.

By now it was 1940. My father and another Pole, also employed by the airline, left Romania illegally, while my mother and I and the other man's wife and son left legally, to Istanbul, where my father and the other Pole had already arrived. After a few days we all boarded a Polish merchant ship, the *Warsaw*, and landed in Haifa where we moved into an Arab hotel. A few days later, my mother woke me up: "Say goodbye to your father." He was dressed in a khaki uniform and was on his way to Great Britain where he would join a Polish squadron of the RAF and go through the North Africa and Italian campaigns; I would not see him for seven years.

After my father left, my mother, along with the other women and her son, and I moved in with an Orthodox Christian Arab family in Jerusalem. They were three siblings in their seventies, a spinster and two bachelor brothers. I was enrolled in my first school in Jerusalem, a French Catholic school, St. Josef. A bus would pick me up in the morning and bring me back home late in the afternoon. My most persistent memory of the school has to do with what we were given to eat at 4 o'clock each afternoon—bread and butter with apricot preserves. I also believe, but never asked my mother to verify, that at this school there were two daughters of Haile Selassie. They were the first dark-skinned persons I had ever seen and I wondered if they were that color all over, but I did not ask my mother because I had already learned that she never answered my questions. However within a year my question was answered in Livingstone, Rhodesia.

For now, though, the school day was very long. There were two other Polish girls. We would get a main meal from Polish nuns located not far from the school. Once home I always had homework which meant my mother had to stand guard over me because little Wiesia liked to knock over the ink. (There were four of us in one room with two beds; each mother and child in one bed.) Our Arab hosts were very good to us and often fed us. I remember the taste of mutton fat on the roof of my mouth. The mothers flushed some

of that meat down the toilet. I do know that when the first Christmas came in 1940, I was in the hospital with unspecified complaints. So I never got to see Bethlehem with my mother and her friend. However I did get to see the “Hunchback of Notre Dame” with Lon Chaney and Maureen O’Hara, along with the nanny and the two children living next door. I had terrible nightmares after that film and wonder today who had the bright idea of taking small children to see that film. I remember that we had an outing in which I swam in the Dead Sea and got a rash. I also recall being in Tel Aviv and seeing Australian soldiers peeing in the streets.

The Germans began air raids over Palestine and I recall having to get up and hide in the closet, at which point we were given the proposition of leaving Palestine and joining a group of Poles, the so-called Cyprus group. The Poles in the Cyprus group were the important people [*intelligentsia*] in Poland. Among those people were the wife and daughter of the Polish prime minister’s secretary, a well-known Polish author, and others. The British government because of continuing German air raids over Palestine had decided to send the Poles to central Africa for the duration of the war. Not all Cyprus Poles agreed to go to Africa. We were invited to join the group and the decision was made to do that. Our Arab hosts begged us not to leave, saying they would take care of us if the Germans came. But leave we did. First by train to Egypt and then by the liner *Mauritania* we sailed to Durban, South Africa, where we boarded trains which after a long journey deposited us in Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia (today’s Zambia). (*To be continued in the summer newsletter.*)

Bogna and her mother were among approximately 20,000 Poles, mostly women and children and elders, to find refuge in Africa during the war. They were among the earliest arrivals (September 1941). They were followed later by those originally from Eastern Poland, who, after the Soviets invaded in mid-September 1939, had been taken to Siberia and spent time in labor camps, until their evacuation to Persia. As Polish men were absorbed into the British fighting forces, the British government took responsibility for their family members, keeping some in the Middle East and sending others to India, Mexico, and New Zealand, as well as Africa. Their care came under the purview of British colonial governments and the Polish government in exile.

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state, one in which the culture of *Rus’* played a very significant role as the Lithuanians were pagan and at a relatively low cultural level. This Lithuanian-Russian state can be seen as the true heir to Kyiv and the progenitor of Ukraine. But by the mid-15th century, Lithuania had come into dynastic union with Poland and Polish-Catholic culture became increasingly dominant.

From the 16th century on, the lands of today’s Ukraine were contested by Poland, Ottoman Turkey, and Muscovite Russia. But for all this, a sense of Ukrainian nationhood began to emerge with a distinct culture and language. This accelerated after the partitions of Poland in the 18th century and the development of ethnic nationalism in eastern Europe following the French revolution and the revolutions of 1848. And while Ukraine never established itself as a nation-state, this is not as strange as it may seem. State-building in central Europe is recent. Italy, Romania, and Germany were scattered

(continued on the back page)

principalities, “geographical expressions” until the 1860s and 1870s. The ancient Kingdom of Hungary would not regain its full independence until 1867, although still under the Habsburgs, and Poland remained suppressed and divided until after World War I. Czechoslovakia, Finland, and the Baltic states established their statehoods at that time as well.

By the eve of the First World War a significant Ukrainian national movement had developed in both the Russian Empire and Austrian Galicia, and Ukraine proclaimed its independence in 1917. Its boundaries and politics were uncertain and contested, however, and before 1939 Ukraine was divided between Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the USSR, where it was one of the founding republics. In Soviet times, Ukrainian culture was promoted in a limited way. But although national separatism was discouraged, Ukraine was a member of the UN from the very beginning. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 Ukraine emerged as a recognized nation with boundaries that Russia accepted. Those boundaries encompassed Crimea, although that region had never been part of Ukraine until Khrushchev gave it to Ukraine. (To my knowledge, when Ukraine proclaimed its independence in 1917 it did not claim Crimea).

Vladimir Putin asserts that Ukraine is not a “real” country, and his historical “project” is designed to support that idea. It claims that his Russia has its origins in ancient *Rus*’ and its development embraced all East Slavs. They can have no real national life outside it, they are peoples without a state. Ukrainian historians can sketch another “project.” Russia’s history begins not in Kyiv but with the Mongols. Russia is an imperial construct which has never been a real nation-state. In the current tragic war Ukrainians are advancing their own foundation “project.” They are people who have found their nation, their state, their soul, and a historical “project” worth fighting for.

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