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Renowned California philanthropists and art connoisseurs Barbra and Bernard Osher established a scholarship for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty researchers at Stanford University's Hoover Institution of War, Revolution and Peace. The Osheers' penthouse apartment in one of San Francisco's tallest skyscrapers boasts a huge picture window that affords a spectacular view of the Golden Gate Bridge, the underlying bay and the Pacific. While immersed in conversation with these gracious hosts, however, one discovers that their interests reach past the horizon on display and extend toward a faraway European country which only comparatively recently appeared on the political world map.

In the summer of 2000, RFE/RL president Thomas Dine and director of broadcasting Jeffrey Trimble announced their selection for the first Osher fellowship. At that time I had no plans to write a book. It was their decision to send me to Stanford — as well as the efforts of colleagues Richard Wiest, Don Jensen and Ross Johnson — that made this book possible.

The director of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, John Raisian and his colleague Charles Palm, created all the conditions for productive research at the Hoover Archives and Library, and ensured that I had wide access to Stanford University's intensive intellectual community.

Anyone who has ever had the good fortune to meet Elena Danielson, director of the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, will know that the art of archiving is one of the most vibrant, interesting and compelling of disciplines. Elena's infectious enthusiasm and vast, detailed knowledge of the historical treasures in Hoover's possession leaves one breathless. It was Elena who placed before me on a huge table in Hoover's reading room a voluminous file containing letters written to Herbert Hoover. It was among these missives that I was surprised to discover a letter of gratitude posted from Belarus' Bieraście region, six signatories of which bore my family name. Over the course of the next three months, Elena Danielson's magic touch summoned forth from the depths of the Hoover archives dozens of boxes labeled "Minsk", "Vitebsk", "Homel". These cartons were filled with documents attesting to the greatest humanitarian aid effort Belarus would see in the 20th century. Thanks in great part to Elena Danielson, their time of discovery had arrived.

The kind help and support of the curator of Hoover's Russia/CIS collection, Joseph Dwyer and his good-hearted assistant Amy Desai lent a

focus to my work and made it all the more fruitful and pleasant. The efforts of archivist Carol Leadenham helped to unearth several unique photographs contained in the book.

While I was at Stanford, chronicler of American Belarusiana Vitaŭt Kipiel sent me a comprehensive article devoted to the ARA in Belarus, published by the Belarusian Institute of Arts and Sciences (NY) in its journal *Zapisy*. The author of the article was Kipiel's daughter, Alice, who first investigated the ARA effort in Belarus for her graduate thesis at Princeton University. Alice Kipiel was a gracious and helpful consultant and suggested several invaluable sources, for which I am most grateful.

I met US journalist and author ("Children of Chernobyl") Michele Carter and her husband Mike Venturino 15 years ago during one of their many humanitarian and business trips to Belarus. It was in their hospitable California home that the first notations for this book were set to paper.

Historian Vital Skałaban's encyclopedic knowledge of the last century and the assistance of Belarusian National Archives director Viačasłaŭ Sielamienieŭ helped to reveal ARA's history from the Belarusian perspective. Also of aid in this regard were consultations with historian Alaksandra Hieś. Without the input of Alena Ściapanava of Viciebsk and Maryja Šymanouškaja of Homiel this book would be at least one quarter shorter and much less rich in factual data; it would be difficult to overestimate their assistance in the search for local archival documents.

Every single page of this tome bears the imprint of that most demanding of editors, Alaŭcina Viačorka. Dozens of dates, names, quotes, historical facts were checked and rechecked under her watchful eye, and previously unknown postulations and explanations were discovered. Indeed, the volume of information to which Alaŭcina lent her critical editorial eye far exceeds the size of the final product. At times, she and I would argue for days over a single word or even letter; I am confident that those debates resulted in rewrites that will ultimately serve the reader. Such editorial perfectionism and the expert laser-like copy-editing of Alaksandra Makavik bear something in common with neurosurgery in terms of their precision; if this book contains any inaccuracies, responsibility for them lies solely with the author.

My old friend, artist Hienadź Macur has a unique feel for the style of the era, and it is his design that lends the book an appropriate elegance. In my opinion, his graphics and artwork for this and other tomes could be used as models in schools for book design.

The author is also grateful to his colleagues at the Belarus service of Radio Liberty, who first articulated the words written in this book on the station's airwaves. My colleague there, Bohdan Andrusyšin, helped me decipher some of the quirkiness of early 20th century English. Sincere thanks for their kind assistance are also extended to Anatol Shmelev and Heather Wagner in

Stanford, Franak Viačorka in Miensk and Kacia Łukašuk in Regensburg.

And to all the numerous researchers who preceded me, whose efforts provided such an important foundation for this book, eight full decades after the departure from Belarus of the last ARA worker, I offer you a sincere and heartfelt — Thank You!/Дзякуй!

SUMMARY

The Adventures of ARA in Belarus — A history of the greatest yet least remembered humanitarian aid operation of the 20th century — Herbert Hoover’s American Relief Administration project in Belarus 1920—1923.

While pouring through the archives of the Hoover Institution in California, author Alaksandar Łukašuk unexpectedly discovered the names of his forebears among ARA aid recipients.

The book’s heroes are thirteen Americans who fed the hungry, healed the sick, and sheltered the homeless and orphaned. Astoundingly, they accomplished their noble goal in spite of an arcane communist bureaucracy, threats from the secret police, and efforts to discredit their reputations. Some of the men married Belarusian women and, for decades after returning home, retained a special place in their hearts for a land called Belarus.

“Liberty Library” consists of selected programs from Radio Liberty’s Belarus Service.