

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot

Published by:
KAM association - Galichnik

Publisher:
Mitre Azhieski

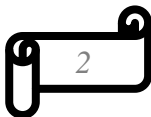
Editor:
Kosto Graorkoski

Text processing and editing:
Biljana Stajkovska

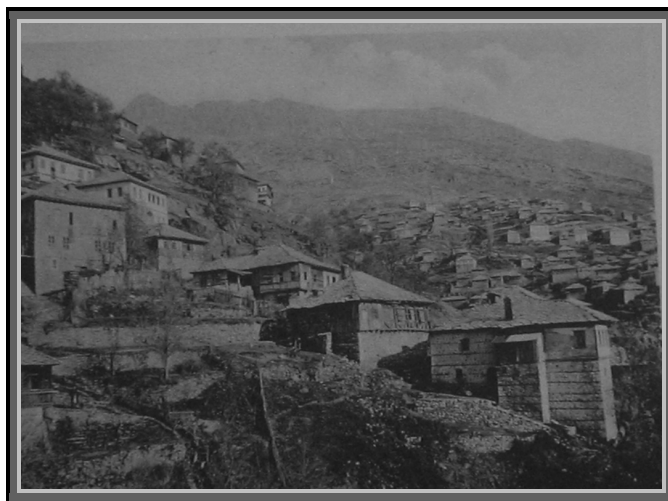
Lector:
Hajda Nikolova

Translated by:
Nevenka Nikolikj

Printed by:
Ekonomiks Plus Skopje



Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



Galichnik seen from Torteska Krasta

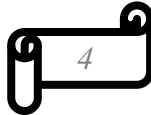
This publication marks the acknowledgement and the appreciation of the people from Galichnik, on the occasion of the 110 years from the birth of the american author Louis Adamic, who immortalized Galichnik and Macedonia in his book "The Native's Return".

Changing Direction

We only spent a few hours altogether in Sushak and in Rijeka.

We went onto a small Yugoslavian steamboat, which plied between Venice, Trieste and Sushak that summer, as well as along the Dalmatian coast towards South.

According to our plan, that we made in Slovenia with the help of several connoisseurs of Dalmatia, we were supposed to stop in Split and stay there for two to three weeks possibly a whole month, and visit the nearby towns of Trogir and Shibenik, the islands Hvar and Brac, and then go to the island Korchula, which according to some sources, is the birthplace of Marco Polo; thence to Dubrovnik, where we intended to spend at least two months, making short trips to Montenegro and to Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc. - however, we weren't even halfway to Split yet, and our intentions had already



altered.

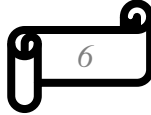
Almost immediately, after we had sailed out of Sushak, we met two Macedonian emigrants in the U.S.A. who were going back to Galichnik. When they told me that they come from Galichnik, i got the impression that they expected me to know what and where is Galichnik. They were acting as if Galichnik was famous, just like Paris or Hollywood, for example. But, i had never heard about Galichnik before, and after a few moments i admitted that. Then one of them, who mentioned seeing my name once on a cover of a magazine in New York, began telling me about the place, which as i had understood, must be somewhere in the mountains of Macedonia, close to the Albanian border. He talked about Galichnik for a whole hour, maybe more, and what i heard seemed so interesting, that somewhere halfway between Sushak and Split we accepted their offer - they were brothers - to join them and be their guests in Galichnik, Stella and i.

Leaving Split in favour of Galichnik

And instead of stopping in Split, we carried on South by the same boat to Kotor, an old harbour of Boka Kotorska, where we left the boat with our acquaintances from Galichnik. We got dressed in our sportswear, because we were told that part of the road to Galichnik must be taken by foot or on a horse.

For reasons to be known in the next chapter, our hosts were very much eager to get home and although we arrived in Kotor at twilight, Stella and i had barely some free time to place the luggage at the desk of the steamboat association when we already found ourselves in the huge Buick, taxi, which they quickly hired to take us across Montenegro, that starts right from Kotor, then along the Albanian border, all the way to some 35 km away from their place.

That was the most exciting car ride that Stella

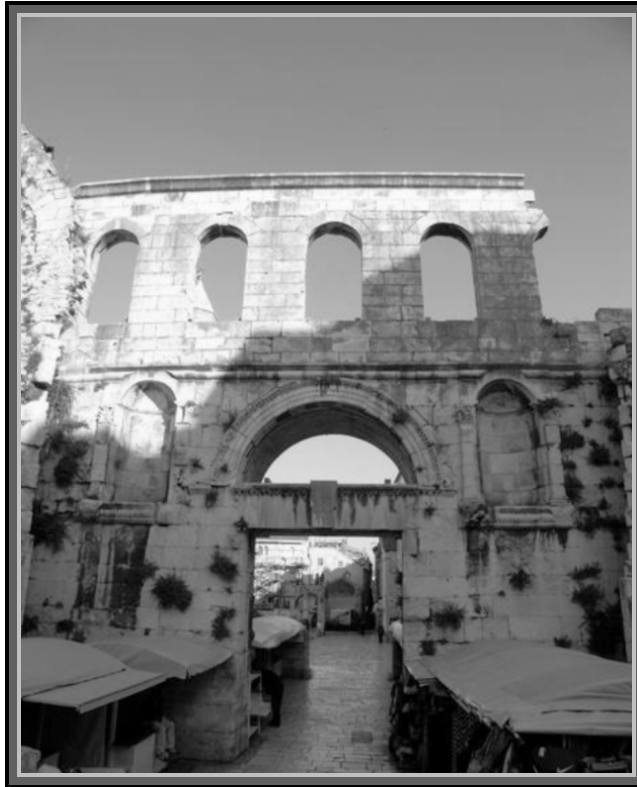


and i have ever experienced. Fortunately, as we convinced ourselves during the ride, our driver was probably one of the best in Europe. He had been a personal driver of the deceased Tsar Carlo Austro-Hungarian during the war.

In the half-light, while we were leaving Kotor, we could only guess that some of the buildings belong to the old Venetian style. "You will see them on your way back", said one of our hosts.

Not even an hour passed since we had left the boat, and we were already climbing the road that bends to the steep slopes of the Mount Lovcen, one of the most dangerous track roads in Europe, which bears an unforgettable view. As it was getting darker and darker, we could only notice a few lights beneath us, in the abyss, as it seemed, when the headlights were exposing the next twist of the bend, which seemed sharper each time.

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



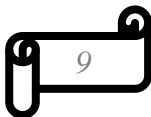
Dioklecian's palace in Split

Spending the whole night driving...

As we got to the top of the Mount Lovcen, one of our hosts said: "We are in Montenegro now", but we still couldn't see anything, except for the road some ten metres ahead of us and rocks on either side of it. It was a great relief not to drive along the bends anymore, and the combination of highland and marine air created an extremely pleasant feeling in the nares and in the chest.

We passed through some places that looked like villages, from time to time. A dog would have barked. In the thread of light at the roadside a silhouette would have appeared. Suddenly, a villager, who seemed to me as tall as a tree, shouted: "Have a safe journey!", though, of course, he had not the remotest idea who we are and where we are going.

"Thank you, my friend! Good night!", our hosts responded.



There was no light at all in the villages. We didn't know then that most of the Montenegrin villagers are so poor, that they are not even able to buy petroleum for their lanterns, if they had lanterns at all.

The road was narrow, but quite slick and firm, with rocks all around. Round midnight we passed through a settlement, which looked like a town from the former kingdom of Montenegro, and now seat of the district, which, besides Montenegro, includes parts of Herzegovina and the coastline of South Dalmatia. We passed through the place without stopping.

We were driving all night, probably not more than 50 km/h, though it seemed to us that we were going twice the speed. We covered Montenegro in width. The driver placed two cans of petrol on the thresholds of the car for the way back. We had dinner at the boat, and we carried with us a pack of sandwiches and two packs of fruit, a bottle of plum brandy and a water canister.

We didn't speak much. Our hosts were in a

sentimental mood, so they were singing Macedonian folk songs, a strange mixture of melancholy and life joys, that no poet has managed to capture before. They ought to be listened.

Round two o'clock after midnight a tyre bursted, but half an hour later we were driving again. At four o'clock, when dawn found us suddenly, we arrived in a small and nondescript, halfalbanian, halfmacedonian village in the mountain that forms the border between Yugoslavia and Albania, when the driver, after pulling over on the main and the only street, said: "There, that's the furthest i can take you". He also said that just a few days earlier, he brought here a group of people heading for Galichnik. "Those are special kind of people, the people from Galichnik", he whispered, "Have you ever been to Galichnik?"

"No, i have not".

"Interesting!", he added, with an expression of self-importance. "Quite strange!".

We ate the sandwiches and we bought some goat's milk and cheese in one house, and that was

our breakfast. Somehow, none of us was anywhere near sleepy. Stella and i put it down to the fresh mountain air and the driving that kept us tense all night long.

Looking at the small map of Yugoslavia, which I bought on the boat, i said to Stella: "In all likelihood, we are now deep and high on the Balkans, as far as it gets from Slovenia, without crossing the border".

A bit at a time, around ten people gathered from somewhere, dressed exactly like our hosts: a tight-fitting vest and tight traditional breeches, and a small hat- all made from the same material, thick, rough, brown homespun, obviously woven and sewn in the rural households. They were people from Galichnik going back home. They had got to here the previous night, some by bus, and some by foot.

We had 35km more ahead of us. We found Stella a horse, because her shoes were not suitable for walking on the sharp stones along the mountainous road that we were supposed to pass; and the rest of us, after buying some plain food from

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot

the villagers, carried on by foot. We set off at 7 o'clock. Round 3 o'clock in the afternoon, after an exhausting footwork, as i have never experienced before, we arrived in Galichnik.



On a horse

"Grass Widows"

The village of Galichnik - which is at an elevation of 1000 metres in a desolate and not easily accessible mountain where the road led us - probably belongs to one of the most peculiar civilizations of the world. It is a village of "grass widows". Nearly 11 months of the year, no grown man can be found in a single household, from around hundred households, except for one, or two clergymen, and several men at the age of 80 or 90. Women comprise most of the adults of this community-young, old and middle-aged, mainly poorly educated, but surprisingly intelligent, and often, of exceptional beauty.

Their husbands and eldest sons (provided that they have reached the age of 15) are scattered around Central and Western Europe, Greece, Romania and Yugoslavia, on the north coast of Africa, in the parts of Asia Minor, in Russia and in

the United States of America, where, during the constructional season, they do highly specialized building work, woodwork, carpentry, and similar work, supporting themselves and their families with the earnings.

The story of Galichnik- which by the way is just one of the few villages in the middle of the high hills and ridges on the border between Yugoslavia and Albania - is quite a dramatic one. It begins in the past, when more then 500 years ago, the Turks conquered the medieval Macedonian kingdom and a lot of Macedonian families, especially those with young women, daughters and sons, had to flee with all the movables to a foreign country or in the high mountains, beyond the reach of the avaricious and vehement officers and soldiers of the sultan.

When the Turks conquered Macedonia, the future founders of Galichnik were known as skilful craftsmen, and they lived in the towns and the places of the flatland.

They were organized in guilds and they were very proud of their skills.

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



Bride

How did Galichnik become a permanent residence?

As it appears, the leaders of the guilds thought that the Turks would not stay for long, so they prompted the members and their families to seek for safety in the mountains, and hundreds of them had done so. The families have settled as high as they could get, taking along everything they could, including their sheep, tools, and the crests or the emblems of their guilds.

However, contrary to the supposition of the leaders of the guilds, the Turks remained in Macedonia nearly five centuries, during which time, Galichnik, as well as the rest of the neighbouring settlements, has become a permanent residence, despite the severe drawbacks in its location, Galichnik has, in fact, remained the same today, as it had been a hundred years ago.

In the 15th century, when it became obvious

that the Turks would stay, the original inhabitants of Galichnik started building houses, which were built so well, that many of them still exist today, and most descendants live there. Of course, those are stone houses, built inexpertly and primitively, in the manner of the medieval residential architecture of the Balkan places and cities. However, some of them are quite commodious, comfortable and bright, although not as nice as the modern residential buildings in the suburbs of the American and the European cities; altogether they make up a harmonious unity like perhaps somewhere in Europe or in America.

Galichnik is fused with its hilly areas or better said, it hangs on one side of the mountain. Its walls and roofs are made from stone plates pulled up from where the houses are now and whose colour is not different from the surrounding stony landscape. When Stella and i approached the village, we didn't even notice it until we were barely a minute away from it.

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



Wedding procession

The emigration and work abroad - "oldest profession"

The surrounding hills are practically stones. Here and there one can notice a group of poorly grown trees or a piece of land covered with short and sharp grass. The ground there is not really in the state to yield anything else. Therefore, not being able to provide livelihood in their district, the habitants of Galichnik as well as the other similar villages in these mountains, started going abroad to earn a living many centuries ago, actually, almost at the same time after settling in the region. In the course of time, they became reputed as excellent craftsmen with keen tradition of pride for their masterstroke in many parts of the world, and up until several years ago, when the whole world started weeping under the weight of the most serious crisis in the history, they never had difficulties finding a job anywhere in the world.

They call themselves migrant workers (world wage-earners). Many of them practise the same profession that their great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers have practised up until 500 years ago. Once the eldest sons turn 14 or 15, their fathers, by tradition as old as the village itself, take them along to Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Denmark, Egypt, Russia, or to the USA. Then they begin learning the family trade, which gradually builds up the pride of the masterstroke, of the Galichnik tradition, the achievements of the people from Galichnik scattered around the whole world.

Masons and stonemasons from Galichnik have worked on the Versailles palaces, Budapest bridges, St. Stefan's Cathedral in Vienna, the large hotels that overlook the Gulf of Naples, the royal palaces in Belgrade and Bucharest, the Mormon temple in Utah, the colossal Dnieprostroi in Russia, and the Empire State Building in Manhattan.

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



A couple

The women from Galichnik are the key factors in the endurance of this fascinating settlement

And while the men are away, the women from Galichnik - the "grass widows" - look after the house, the children, the village. They spin wool on a spindle, wool sheared from the sheep that are kept on the bits of grass that grows around the village. They weave woollen fabric on the yarn of spinning jennies in their houses, for making their colourful garbs, just like their great-grandmothers and great-great-grandmothers made them many centuries ago.

Having in mind the Balkans, Galichnik is a well enduring village (or more precisely: it *was* a well enduring village, until the crisis crushed it); the men were able to send or bring the best fabrics to their wives from the biggest cities in Europe or America, or ready-made dresses, but it was contrary to their traditional customs. The women from Galichnik are expected to make their own clothing

and most of them like it. "Besides" - one of them said - "what would we occupy ourselves with, when we wouldn't weave and make clothes for us and our families?" Also, in my opinion, the garbs that they make, although a bit ponderous, are much prettier and suit them more than any other dress or costume that their husbands would bring from the great world of machines and mass production.

Another traditional duty of the women from Galichnik is to make sure that they stay attractive for as long as possible. It is necessary, because, as an elderly lady that i talked to concerning this matter said, "in order to be most certain that a husband would come back from the foreign parts full of many temptations, the woman must be so attractive and beautiful when her husband leaves, that from that moment on he will constantly long for their next meeting - and when he is back, she must not disappoint him."

It is not hard for the women in Galichnik to keep in shape. The air and the sun rays in the mountains are extremely beneficial. The food they

consume is extra plain. Since early childhood they are constantly moving about the steep paths around their village and to the neighbouring ones. Unlike the duties of most women in the rest of the Balkans, their day-to-day duties are rarely demanding. As a consequence a lot of them, as i have already mentioned, are naturally beautiful, even when they are older. Their facial features are evenly chiseled out by the hereditary diligence and the history, of which they are constantly aware, and the profound soundness of the simple life they lead, the fresh air, the mountain sun, and the moderate but expressive and wisely tuned rhythm of life, makes them incredibly endearing and gentle.

Most of the women from Galichnik are of medium height, graceful, and have an almost magnificent gait, but are noticeably reserved. Observing them for days, while staying there, it became clear to us that their beauty is not so much individual or personal, as it is a part or a feature of one harmonious unity called the village of Galichnik and the mountains that surround it. They left us both

with an impression of certain flawlessness, but such flawlessness, it seemed that only existed while they were in those surroundings.

While they were resting, or even working on the spinning jennies, they were singing some old, mainly melancholy songs, full of yearning for their loneliness, for the arduous work of their husbands and sons abroad. But, they are not unhappy, as one would think, certainly not piteous. The attractiveness of their faces, as well as the attractiveness of their songs, consists in a single tone of sadness- a consequence of the centuries-old shared destiny that the women comprehend and embrace.

The stories of Galichnik- tragic like the Greek tragedies

When they are not singing, they are more than happy to tell their children endless stories about Galichnik, from the day it was built to the present day. The stories are quite simple, but they represent a voluminous unrecorded saga, whose reach surpasses, both in time and in space, as well as with its sensitivity, every saga recorded in the books.

The women narrate some of the stories, which speak of the village and the experiences of its habitants in the world, in a vivid, poetic language. Some of them are tragic, almost like the Greek tragedies. They speak of the people who have left Galichnik and never returned again, because they have died in accidents at work in France, Spain, Egypt, or in the United States of America - or worse - because they have succumbed to a potent temptation in the big wide world, thus forgetting

about their village.

Those are briefly the key factors of the endurance of this strange settlement, even at present when Macedonia is not under the Ottoman Empire - firstly, the entire dramatic and rich history of Galichnik kept and nurtured in the thoughts and the hearts of the women from one generation to another; secondly - the old Galichnik tradition of pride in the superb masterstroke and the glory that the migrant workers from Galichnik have achieved among the builders and the entrepreneurs of the whole world; thirdly - the real beauty of the women from Galichnik which is the reason why the men always return; and, at last- (what links the three together) the substantial tragedy which springs from the circumstances in which the place was built and the conditions under which it endured.

The return of the migrant workers from "the big wide world"

Once a year, between 1st and 15th July, most of the men return from the big wide world. Those who work in Europe and Asia Minor or in North Africa are coming home every year, while those in America and the distant parts of Russia every second or even third year.

The men had just started to return when Stella and i arrived in Galichnik. Certainly, the women, as well as their houses were in their best looks. Subdued excitement and joy floated in the air. There is one post office in the village that also renders services to the neighbouring settlements, so twice a week when the post arrives, a lot of dressed-up women and children gather in front of the building, on the little narrow square, in anticipation of news from their husbands and fathers. It is a deeply emotional scene; not many migrant workers write

about their return, most of them simply arrive, but still, the women gather in front of the post office.

Two roads lead to Galichnik; one from Skopje, around 50 km away by airway, and the other one, which is a bit longer, from Cetinje, but the journey lasts two days, no matter what road one takes, unless it is by car, like the journey we took, however, not many migrant workers can afford that. They usually travel in small groups, because most of them carry their savings with them, and they might come across robbers in the mountains where the road leads, although, as they said, it has been rather safe in the last few years.

Wherever they go, in America, Greece, Germany, they wear typical clothes for that country; but when they go back to Galichnik, they always put on their traditional garbs, woven and sewn by their mothers or wives.

"Galichnik hospitality"

The journey was exhausting, but once we were there, we could never regret taking it. The people are extremely hospitable, just like in Slovenia. When they found out that i am Yugoslavian by birth, who has become an American author, and that my wife is an American, born in New York, we were immediately guests of literally the whole community. Someone had read something about me in the papers. We were served with all the best they had. During those two weeks that we spent with them, we practically had to visit each house and drink at least a little bit of vine or brandy every time.

I could speak Serbian, but Stella was also included in the conversation, although the Serbian language was as alien to her as the Siamese. Quite a few people from Galichnik spoke two, or three, even four foreign languages, including English, even though they were not officially educated. As a

matter of fact, during those few weeks in the summer, when the migrant workers are home, Galichnik, considering the countries they have come back from, is probably the world's most cosmopolitan spot. Talking to the people, i found out a lot about the trade and the events in Greece, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Austria, Germany, Spain and Russia. Some of the accounts of the social, economic and political circumstances in those countries seemed creditable, as if i was reading them from an average European magazine or newspaper.

They showed a lot of interest in the overall economic crisis and the possibilities to emerge out of it, because their status and their possession depend on the state of the world economy to a great extent. They assumed that as an American author i am a good judge of that matter, so every day around ten people at once gathered around me. They were especially interested to hear about the situation in the USA, both the ones who have been there, and the ones who have not. They could sense that the recuperation of the world economy, which is of great

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot

importance to Galichnik, depends a lot on the capability of the USA to get out of the depression.



Children

High and strong morale

I found out that two people from Galichnik worked on the building of Radio City in New York, which was being built at that exact period. We met their wives, two out of ten whose husbands did not return that summer.

While we were staying there, one "grass widow" became a real widow. Her husband had died in an accident on the Insbrook building site in Austria, just a few days before asking for a permission to come home.

But, as far as i could notice, that was the only mournful event in Galichnik during our stay. There was a lot of celebration and festivity. The tables were full of good Dalmatian wine, and the local shops were full of food specially brought from Skopje for that occasion.

However, the celebration and the festivity were not exaggerated. In fact, among the most

important characteristics of the life in Galichnik are the moderation and the temperance. There is neither excess in the speech, nor in the behaviour, there is no overindulgence in food, drinks, or no matter what else.

It seemed to me that the women deserve more credit than the men for this characteristic. One has to be sensible and temperate in Galichnik. Their lives depend on it. If they are walking along the stony and steep tracks around their village, even the smallest wrong step can lead to death; and those tracks symbolize best their life in general. In relation to this i must point out that the morale in Galichnik is pretty high and strong. One of the local sayings goes as follows: "When a man doesn't come home for a long time, he expects to find everything in best order". And in return, the men in general are equally faithful to the women, as the women are to them.

Communal wedding day - on St Peter's Day 12th July

The return of the migrant workers from abroad is a top occasion of a year in the life of Galichnik. However, there is a top of the top occasion- which is the communal wedding day, when all the couples who intend to get married that year, marry at the same time. This event takes place every year on the same day: 12th July.

While we were there 16 couples got married. All the grooms were from Galichnik. Only two of them were not really migrant workers. The rest of them had returned home for that very reason. Those two were shepherds who put their herds out to grass farther off the village, so they too, were barely home. Half of the brides were from Galichnik, and the other half from the surrounding villages. One of the brides was a widow with two children; her husband had died two years before in an accident in

Alexandria in Egypt. That summer she got married to one of his friends.

The wedding ceremony was performed by a clergyman from the Eastern Orthodox Church. The act was very quaint, but brief: however the wedding feast that followed lasted whole three days filled with such songs and melodies that Stella and i had not heard before; heavy sounds of drums and mellow tones of shepherd's pipes. They were doing the "oro", a Yugoslavian folk dance. It was exactly what one man who had come from America called it, "the main attraction" of the season.

On the last day of the wedding ceremony, i talked to an 80 year old man who has worked on the bridges and the constructions in 11 different countries in his youth. "I'd say that all of them, including the grooms, will go to - Egypt, Italy, Carigrad, Prague, Barcelona, New York, Philadelphia, - soon after two weeks. And the women, including the brides, will be alone again. And," - he smiled - "nine months from now, around 50 to 80 boys and girls will be born in our village in

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot

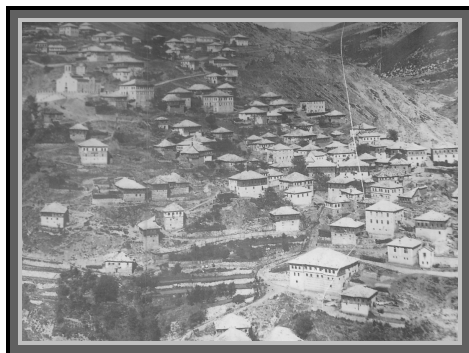
a week; which means, five even ten per day, and their fathers will only see them four months later, in summer, when they return home again. That's the way life goes in Galichnik".



Family

There are still traces of the past in Macedonia

Out of the three regions that we speak about in this chapter, Macedonia is the most interesting one. There are traces of the past everywhere, it goes as far as Alexander the Great, all the way from the ancient Celts, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, the ancient kingdom of Macedonia and the medieval Turks...



„Chuchka malo“ – part of Galichnik

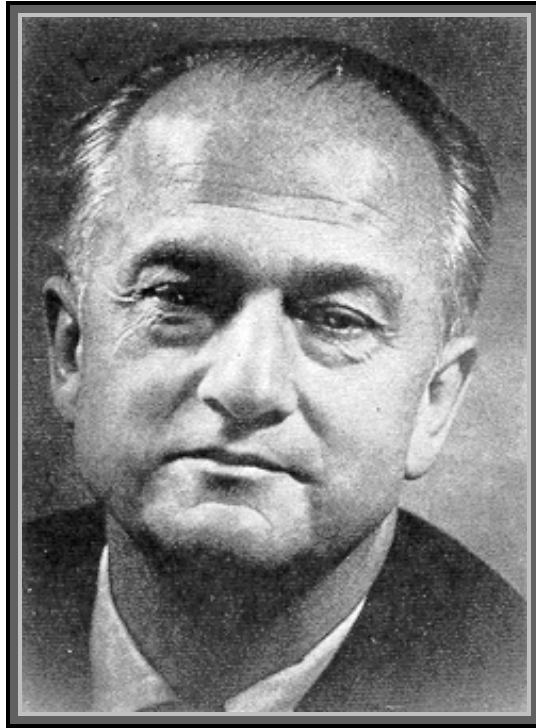
Author's biography

Louis Adamic, one of the greatest American authors of Yugoslavian origin, was born in 1898 in Grosuplje, Austro-Hungary, today's Slovenia. In his writings he describes the life of the emigrants. His works include: "Cradle of Life", "Dynamite", "My America"... In his book "The Native's Return", there is a chapter about Macedonia titled "The clock handles go backwards here". In this chapter, the author actually speaks about Galichnik, where he stayed thanks to two Macedonian emigrants in the USA, who were going back home.

Adamic is a proclaimed antifacist and sincere friend and supporter of the great scientist Nikola Tesla. He was involved in direct action during the First World War as a soldier of the US army.

Dies in New Jersey, USA, 1951.

Louis Adamic: Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot



Louis Adamic 1898-1951

CIP – Catalogization in publication
People's and university library „Sv. Kliment Ohridski“, Skopje

821.111(731 – 992)
908(497.761)

ADAMIC, Louis
Galichnik the world's most cosmopolitan spot / Louis Adamic
| translation on English Nevenka Nikolikj |; Association KAM, 2008;
42, 42 pag.; illustration. 22 pic.

Title page of the printed text: Галичник најкосмополитско место на
светот / Луј Адамич; - Both texts printed together in opposite
direction. – Text on Mac. and Engl.

ISBN 978 – 9989 – 2603 – 4 – 8
1. Адамич, Луј / Adamic, Louis
а) Galichnik
COBISS.MK - 1D 73558794

