

## ARTICLES

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### CHANGES IN PEASANT CHILDREN'S READING PRACTICES AND LIVING CONDITIONS IN DNIEPER UKRAINE AT THE TURN OF THE 19TH-20TH CENTURIES

**Abstract:** The article analyzes the reading practices and living conditions of Ukrainian peasant children as a social phenomenon. The children's reading modes in the family system and social distribution of household duties and leisure activities are presented. Herein characterized are the specific features of reading training in the period of modernization transformations against the background of the urbanization processes; post-reform emancipation; public life's politicization; and increasing volumes of information required for the reorganization of the lifestyle. The author shows the gradualness of changes in view of economic problems, the close connection between reading practices and oral culture; the lack of educational institutions, the inertia in public perceptions of the social position of the peasantry, and the assessment of social perspectives for the self-realization of literate villages. It was found that despite the unfavorable circumstances, there was an increase in the pace of peasants' awareness of the importance of literacy for their children in the future. New reading practices contributed to the transformation of the private sphere of young people, personal independence, and individualization of life scenarios.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian peasants, reading practices, economic conditions, modernization changes, transformation of the privacy sphere

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## INTRODUCTION

From the mid-nineteenth century, an important element of modernization changes in Dnieper Ukraine (the conventional name of the part of Ukrainian territory included in the Russian Empire) was the involvement of Ukrainian peasants and especially their children in the world of the

printed word. The acquisition of reading by minors was closely linked to their living conditions and current social perceptions of the position and future of the peasantry.

The interrelated changes in reading practices and the general lifestyle of peasant children took place against the backdrop of the economic, social, public, and cultural processes at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the Industrial Revolution, urbanization, changes in the organization of the peasants' economy, the politicization of public life, the formation of modern identities, and the growing influence of urban culture.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

Ukrainian historiography is well-developed in the field of institutional support for cultural initiatives of public groups and imperial authorities that characterized the process of the school education system (Шаравара, 2011; Гупац, 2002). Analyzed educational activities of the zemstvos (elected bodies of local self-government in 1864–1918), cultural-enlightenment and cooperative societies (Милько, 2019; Коломієць, 1998; Березівська, 1999; Євселевський and Фари́на, 1993; Лисенко, 2008), which create a network of libraries, reading rooms, and bookstores, including those that meet the needs of children and youth (Кароєва, 2014: 313–337). The issue of the dependence of peasant children's reading modes on the conditions of their existence remained outside the attention of researchers. Moreover, the children also read outside the educational and cultural institutions, the network of which did not cover all residents of the Ukrainian countryside.

In the article I make an attempt to analyze the changes in reading practices and living conditions of peasant children in the context of studies on reading history (Lyons, 1999; Дарнтон, 2010), considering reading as a social phenomenon. The sources for this problem of study are scattered in the statistical reports of zemstvos and educational institutions; ethnographic, pedagogical, journalistic and literary works. The memories and autobiographies of the Ukrainian writers and public figures who came from a peasant background and left memories of their acquaintance with the book are of particular importance (Мовчан, 2015; Кононенко, 1998; Конощенко, 1908). A study of the circumstances of how peasant children combined their desire to read with the duties in the family household allows us to find the answer to the fundamental questions in the history of reading "where they read", "how they read", "why they read".

## CHILDREN'S READING PRACTICES IN THE SOCIO-CULTURAL REALITY OF THE UKRAINIAN COUNTRYSIDE

The poet Andrii Holovko (1897–1972) was born in a wealthy peasant family in the Poltava huberniia (province) (it's a major and principal administrative subdivision of the Russian Empire; huberniias were divided into uiezds and volosts). He started school at the age of 8, but learned to read earlier. He left this description of his home readings:

It was noisy in the house in late autumn, in winter. The family was big – 20 people. The spinning wheels were rattling all over the house [...] The boys were still in the yard. But once they've done the chores [in the household – V.V.], they gather together. Someone is knitting, someone is doing something [...] the girls are singing [...]. Oh – they stopped. Oh, that was the grandfather who came out of the room with a book. He walks to the table, adjusting his Glasses.

“Instead of singing songs and talking vainly, you'd rather listen to the word of God.”

“Phew!” the girls and boys make faces [...].

I looked at the book and demonstratively read it – hoot-toot...

My grandfather then:

“Go on, read carefully.”

He reads [the grandfather began to read aloud – V.V.]. A dreary silence comes into the house then. The spinning wheels are rattling; the girls are gossiping. And it lasts long. Until they got tired of it. Then my mother says with such innocence: “Couldn't we have dinner already?” [...] Everyone is so happy. And indeed – the grandfather closes the book, takes off his glasses, and majestically disappears behind the door with a sense of great satisfaction with the mission accomplished (Мовчан, 2015: 144).

This description fits several characteristic features of the changes that took place in the economic and cultural life of the peasants and affected the peasant children's reading practices:

First, until the beginning of the twentieth century, reading had become a way of spending leisure time and had entered the everyday life of at least some peasant families.

Secondly, during this period, there coexisted the practices of individual reading (like young A. Holovko read in the above extract) and collective reading, which was demonstrated by the grandfather for the whole family. Home oral readings could be combined with the listeners' household chores.

Thirdly, the combination of reading with talking and singing is one of the evidences of the close connection between reading practices and oral culture. Peasants sang, gossiped, shared the news, and listened to lyre and

bandura players. Marusia Volvachivna (Maria Volvach, 1841–?) from the Kharkiv guberniia began composing poetry under the impression of the beauty of folk songs. She had to keep these poems in her memory until she learned to read and write on her own as an adult (*Марія Вольвач...*, 2020). Writer Musii Kononenko (1864–1922) recalled how his friends would ask him to tell something interesting, and then he would fantasize about the stories he had heard, read, and made up. They would thank him with something tasty (КОНОНЕНКО, 1997: 65).

Reading is reflected in various social forms. Oral readings were organized not only in winter and indoors (in schools, village administration buildings, and peasant houses), but book peddlers, who walked around the villages, read aloud to advertise their goods. Some of the literature they distributed was specially designed to be read aloud or sung, and songbooks were in great demand among the peasants. Fairs were another important public place where the printed word was heard. It was enough for a seller or someone from the public to start reading, and a whole crowd would gather (Voloshenko, 2019: 226, 233). As a rule, an unknown text had to be read repeatedly for it to be understood by the mostly illiterate audience. One eyewitness described a peasant reader who “read quite vigorously” while sitting on a cart loaded with sacks, with the other peasants listening, but “obviously not understanding what he read.” They asked him to reread and explain what he had read orally (БЛОНСКИЙ, 1905: 20). At the same fairs, the children of peasants increasingly asked to buy them books as “gifts” (*Продаж...*, 1906).

Collective readings were means of familiarizing with the printed word for most peasants who remained analphabetical. The Australian historian Martin Lyons states that such “generations of listeners” were not yet a “generation of readers” for whom reading was “often a collective experience, integrated into an oral culture” (Lyons, 1999: 343). The same opinion is shared by the American historian Robert Darnton: “Reading continued to be an oral experience performed in public” (ДАРНТОН, 2010: 210). In 1903, in the rural libraries of the Kyiv Literacy Society (1882–1908), there were many more actual book users than registered subscribers. Residents of some neighboring villages also used the books from the libraries. Literate family members read aloud to illiterates, and children and adults exchanged books (*Отчет...*, 1904: 84).

Children took part, not only in spontaneous oral readings, but also in “public readings” sanctioned or unsanctioned by the authorities. Since the mid-nineteenth century, they have been organized by intellectuals, teach-

ers, and priests. Experienced lecturers took into account the level of analphabetism of the peasants and supplemented the reading of written texts with oral explanations and illustrative materials. After 1905, as the cooperative movement grew, it became possible to hold lectures in Ukrainian ('Лекция...', 1912).

During oral readings, children not only listened to books, but they also read them, fulfilling an important social role as disseminators of book knowledge. Mykola Korf (1834–1883), a prominent educator and zemstvo's activist in the Katerinoslav huberniia, noted that children's literacy was important not only for them, but also for their environment – including family, friends, and acquaintances ("literacy leads to literacy") (Корф, 1881: 27).

At the request of adults, children read religious books, and informational as well as entertainment publications. They did this during holidays and on the weekends. Pavlo Maiorskyi in his story "To the Science" depicted a schoolboy reading "Sviatsti" (church calendars with the days of the saints' memory and church holidays) and dream books to peasant women in the middle of the street, and entertaining men by reciting poetry (Майорський, 1904: 298–299).

Children's literacy was used in ceremonial practices. A Ukrainian national movement activist, Andrii Konoshchenko (1857–1932), as a child, had read evening prayers in the church and the Psalter (the Book of Psalms) over the dead. In his opinion, receiving exactly such a benefit from reading was the main goal of the pre-reform school (Конощенко, 1908: 6). In his childhood, the writer Hryhorii Kosynka (1899–1934) was also a reader at funeral rites. In addition, every summer, old peasant women took him to the Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra to read "tables over the saints" to them (Мовчан, 2015: 251).

In their reading practices, children combined reading aloud and silently, in a group and alone. The development of individual reading "made reading a personal and internal experience" (Дарнтон, 2010: 210) and was a sign of the modern transformation of the sphere of privacy. It was possible to read in the warm season, secluded somewhere in a field or forest. For many children, due to seasonal works, school and reading were possible only in winter.

Reading was not supposed to interfere with the main thing – children's household chores, and in many cases, financial assistance to the family. Here there are several examples. When A. Konoshchenko was 5 or 6 years old, he, in his father's svyta (traditional coat) dragging on the ground, ran to enroll in school. His father tracked him down by the traces of svyta, beat

him, and ordered him to return to the household chores: "There is work to be done at home: one should drive the geese off to pasture." However, the priest-teacher managed to persuade his father, so little Andrii could go to school (Конощенко, 1908: 5). Poet Stepan Ben (Stepan Bendiuzhenko, 1900–1937) was forced to work at home and on the landowner's estate from an early age. Playwright Mykola Kulish (1892–1937) was hired to herd pigs and calves from the age of 5 and was also a horse driver. During school vacations, he served rich peasants. At the age of 11, he babysat for a teacher's children (Мовчан, 2015: 55, 259). In his autobiography, the poet Taras Bezshasnyi (it is not known whether he was a real person or a literary character) mentioned that he started earning bread early ("as we, peasants, always do"). From the age of 3, he babysat his younger sister, at 8 he herded pigs, at 10 he worked as a cattle driver, and at 11 he became a cartman for the village paramedic. A school ("the shrine of science") appeared in the village when he turned 14. He realized that he was only now "beginning to live." Books became a comfort in his "spiritual loneliness":

I could go somewhere on a holiday, in winter to a childless neighbor's house, and in summer to the steppe under a grave or in the garden in the shade, in the cherry grove: and then I read and read until my eyes go dark, but in my heart, it is like the sun shining ("Самовродок...", 1897, 1: 3–4).

Writer and publicist Klym Polishchuk (1891–1937), helping his mother with "hard peasant labor," in his childhood had little free time to read books, but he used every free hour for self-education. He read "in the field, under a haystack, during his midday rest" (Мовчан, 2015: 354).

The Ukrainian teacher Tymofii Lubenets (1855–1936) saved a characteristic written reply from one of his village schoolboys. This childhood reading experience was also inextricably linked to the specifics of a family life. On Christmas Eve, the boy helped to chop wood and prepare grain for kutia (a traditional religious porridge), and on the holiday morning he "read a little, wrote a little" and went to church (Лубенець, 1913: 169).

Both teachers and zemstvo's statisticians noted that peasant farmers did not allow their children to go to school in the fall and spring because of the fieldwork. When the first spring grass appeared, rural children had to leave school and spend 8 months doing agricultural labor, which was the basis of the family's well-being. Parents used to say that in spring, "another science" begins. In large families, they were more willing to send younger children to school, assuring them that "they need the big ones at home" (С.П., 1897: 11–12). Sometimes it came to curiosities. One of the

teachers once saw an unfamiliar preschooler, wearing huge boots and with a book under his arm. It turned out that he was sent by his mother instead of his older brother, who was helping his father with the housework that day (Блонский, 1905: 4).

Children employed in various fields of agricultural labor were forced to interrupt or even quit school. In 1906, 25% of students (9377 boys and 4207 girls) had to stop education in the Kherson zemstvo's rural schools (*Краткий обзор...*, 1908: 20). Often children were missing the most basic necessities, such as warm clothes, shoes, school supplies, and textbooks. At the age of 7, M. Kononenko froze his feet when he ran to school barefoot. He didn't have any boots, but he really wanted to learn. His desire influenced the adults. His mother made him clothes from her old sweater, and his teacher lent him money for shoes and school supplies. However, the future writer was able to attend school for only two winters. Due to the lack of money, his mother had to hire him out (Кононенко, 1998: 53, 77).

In their autobiographies and memoirs, Ukrainian writers reflected the special place of materiality in the worldview of peasant children. There was no school in H. Kosynka's village, so he had to be content with reading books that his illiterate father bought in Kyiv (he chose the cheapest and most illustrated ones). The boy never dared to ask a teacher in a neighboring village for books:

he always stood before my eyes in gold buttons and a snow-white shirt front - like a peacock hen, not a person (Мовчан, 2015: 250).

For journalist Terentii Masenko (1903-1970), as a child, reading books was an opportunity to forget the hard reality of living with a drunken father who beat his mother. In addition, little Terentii was always half-starved, not satisfied with a piece of black bread with onions and lean borsch. Contrary to that he found descriptions of a "bright, clean, good life" in books (Мовчан, 2015: 268).

Children associated their hopes for a better future with providing their families with food, clothing, and housing. Taras Bezschasnyi aspired to become a poet and get rich in order to help his family: to build houses for his brothers and father, and to buy expensive clothes for his sisters and stepmother "in the manner of the lord" (*Самовродок...*, 1897, 4: 62). The childhood dreams of Valerian Polishchuk (1897-1937) about his own future as a writer were also combined with the belief that he would be able to do a lot of good to people, namely, build big houses for everyone. Seeing him off to gymnasium, his father asked his son never to forget

the peasants, and always to find a hundred grams of horilka (Ukrainian strong alcoholic drink) and a piece of bacon for his old father (МОВЧАН, 2015: 330, 334).

## READING PERSPECTIVES FOR PEASANT CHILDREN UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF MODERNIZATION TRANSFORMATIONS

In 1885, Ukrainian national movement activist Borys Poznanskyi made a good note that literacy had become a necessity for peasants since the emancipation reform of 1861. After being freed from serfdom and gaining personal freedom, they gradually began to immerse themselves in new social and economic relations. If earlier they had to deal with lords and the estate managers, now have appeared in their lives the representative and executive bodies of peasant self-government Volost Governance, the most important figures of which were village heads and pysars (clerks) who were engaged in all clerical work and signed the agreements, that is, actually performing the duties of the notaries. The life of the peasants was now immersed “to the limits of the written regulations.” They had to deal with the laws and orders of the local authorities, to keep the tax books (in which pysars recorded information about tax payments), and so on. In these conditions, the peasant wanted “to see the light in this new world of writing” and, the most important was to teach his children (П-ский, 1885: 244).

The reading skill was taking a distinctly utilitarian function. Increasingly, reading skills were needed to understand legal or economic issues that were quite often related to rural realities. The economic and cultural influences of the city on the lives of peasants were becoming more and more noticeable. The same is related to the growing role of political events. The Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), the Revolution (1905–1907), and World War I led to the rapid politicization of the peasantry and the growing importance of reading skills. Attention was focused on finding news, legal and illegal literature, writing and reading letters, etc.

There was no consensus in society on the need, content, and scope of peasant education. One of the social visions was based on the patrimonial perception of peasants as children who needed constant control. Supporters of “protective” orders were concerned about the potential for peasants to receive “excessive” information. The educational system and the book print system were under close control by the government and



police. In 1867–1872, M. Korf was in charge of zemstvo's schools in the Oleksandrivsk district of the Katerynoslav guberniia and was one of the founders of the "new school" (a new way of organizing teaching). In 1881, he recalled that the spread of the "new school" was initially opposed by both the Ministry of National Education and a part of society. By the time he wrote his article, accusations that the zemstvo's school was "corrupting" the peasants, turning them away from God and power, and inclining them to revolutionary activity continued unceasingly (Корф, 1881: 2, 8).

In 1902, at the meeting of the Kostiantynohrad Committee "on the needs of the agricultural industry" (one of the local committees established by the government's interdepartmental "Special Meeting" to set policy in the agricultural sector), a proposal to increase the period of education in rural schools from three up to five years was opposed, and the proposal to introduce history, geography, and natural history into the school curriculum seemed ridiculous to many of those present (М-ский, 1902: 167).

However, in public circles, there were those who were well aware of the need to reorganize the system of rural primary education in villages. One of the initiatives was the efforts of Zemstvo's activists to reform the methodology of reading training (as part of replacing the "old" school with a "new" one). Changes in the lifestyle of the villagers and towns people demanded new modes of communication and quick perception of information. In order to solve many issues, written communication became more important than oral one:

Only those who can read in the broad sense of this word can enjoy the fruits of science today. For many, reading replaces a live conversation (Лубенець, 1913: 219).

The integration of peasants into a new social reality required qualitative changes in teaching. The development of information processing skills was impossible without radical changes in reading techniques.

Training in reading and writing according to the "old" method ("Kyiv literacy") demanded a lot of effort and took several years. This made it inaccessible to peasants engaged in farming. They were taught to read from the ABC books with Church Slavonic letters. Later, church editions served as reading books (that is why reading was called "divine books teaching"). The Psalter was most often read. Before and after reading, people used to make the sign of the Cross, prayed, and kissed the open book. They chanted, in fact, "sang the alphabet." This method of training was based on the mechanical memorization of full and abbreviated names of letters, syllables, words, prayers, and even entire texts from the church books. Learning

was so difficult that when it came to reading of the printed Psalter, children might not recognize the letters. The constant repetition of incomprehensible sets of sounds made them reluctant to learn, so teachers resorted to corporal punishment. Reading comprehension was not required: "One had to read just for reading sake." They read monotonously, but quickly and loudly, sometimes from memory (Лубенець, 1913: 84–85, 454–459). The opportunity to read in church or at home for the family was encouraged. A. Konohchenko recalled how his father made him read the Psalter every Sunday, "as if in church" (Конощенко, 1908: 7–9). In the end, this way of reading training contributed to the education of obedience and submission, the habit of taking incomprehensible information on faith. The ability to write was not encouraged because it gave peasants independence. P. Maiorskyi was quite scathing about the results of such training:

There are two or three literates in the entire village of Lypniahi [...], and such literates are not harmful: they read only printed materials properly, but they do not understand both written and printed materials equally (Майорський, 1904: 294).

In the second half of the 1860s, it was in the schools of Ukrainian hibernias that a new, sound-based way of children's reading training began. Schoolchildren were taught reading (the ability to recognize sounds by letters and to combine them into syllables and words) together with writing. The most popular textbooks were written by M. Korf and another well-known teacher of Ukrainian origin, Kostiantyn Ushynskyi (1824–1870). The sound method made the process of reading training much easier, it could be completed even within 1–2 months (though without practice, the skills were quickly lost). Further educational searches were carried out in the direction of practicing explanatory and "always individual" expressive reading (Лубенець, 1913: 89–93, 185, 234).

The spread of the sound method led to the establishment of "extensive" reading, with (relatively) rapid familiarization of readers with large volumes of printed texts; it allowed them to navigate the flow of new information and use it to improve their lives. Such reading contributed to the emancipation of the individual. Learning without constant beatings fostered a sense of self-esteem. Eventually, in the early twentieth century, even the Holy Synod allowed to change the rules for reading training in parochial schools (Лубенець, 1913: 446, 450).

The change in the teaching system was not an action of short duration. Writer Dmytro Kovalenko-Kosaryk (1904–1992), born in the early twentieth century, recalled how his mother taught him to read the old way: he memorized texts and then "read" them to the guests on holidays (Мовчан, 2015:

242). In 1897, an unknown 19-year-old boy from the village of Yadut confessed in a letter to the Poltava Zemstvo that he could read both ways. His parents were amazed that their son had learned to read, write letters, and compose petitions in one winter. At their time they had been studying for 6 years, but did not even know how to sign (C.P., 1897: 14–15). The scene of home reading in A. Holovko's family, presented at the beginning of the article, also shows the coexistence of different ways of reading. Little Andrii showed a tendency towards "extensive" reading. At the same time, the grandfather made his grandson read slowly and thoughtfully. Obviously, he himself had been taught to read "intensively", repeating the text of the same religious book many times. In addition, this passage is an excellent illustration of the decline of religious literature in the social authority: the peasant youth could hardly wait for their grandfather to stop reading.

The ban on teaching in the native language and the absence of national schools was a significant obstacle to the effective education of Ukrainian children. Nevertheless, since the 1840s, the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement have been developing projects to introduce national education and using any opportunity to distribute Ukrainian books to the peasants. During the period of repressive government decrees against the Ukrainian language, individual teachers, priests, zemstvo's leaders, and others were also unofficially engaged in the formation of Ukrainian identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this work was carried out by the members of the cooperative movement. Promoters of new ways of managing peasant households offered "useful" reading, primarily, to young people (Волошенко, 2011).

On the wave of the revolutionary events of 1905, there emerged conditions for the expansion of Ukrainian book print and distribution. However, opportunities for the creation of public national cultural centers in villages remained extremely limited. Rural branches of the cultural and educational association "Prosvita" were only established in some villages in Podillia and Katerynoslav guberniias. Depending on the situation in a particular branch, children could read Ukrainian books in libraries, receive gifts with books for Christmas, and hear the printed Ukrainian word during national holidays ('Загальні збори...', 1913; 'Звідомлення...', 1913). In different guberniias, Ukrainian texts were recited in villages where amateur theater groups were organized by local schoolchildren ('Українські спектаклі...', 1911; 'Українські вистави...', 1912). Peasants began to place portraits of Taras Shevchenko and Ukrainian hetmans near icons. Young people were interested in the extracts of Ukrainian magazines and calendars. Children asked: "Buy one, Daddy, but only a Ukrainian one" ('Пост...', 1914).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the level of illiteracy among the Ukrainian peasantry remained sufficiently high. In 1907, out of a hundred inhabitants of 9 Ukrainian huberniias, there were 19.0% of the literate ones on average, and in the villages, the ratio was 16.2%. The largest share of literate rural residents was in the Tavriia (23.5%) and Katerynoslav (18.8%) huberniias, and the smallest in Chernihiv (14.0%) and Kharkiv (12.7%) (*Статистический справочник...*, 1910: 6–8). Among the peasants there were still opinions that “a book would not feed one with bread” (*‘До читачів’, 1912*), and that education was a “lord’s invention” that caused harm to the child (*‘Национальное самосознание’, 1912*). Parents feared that educated children would abandon agricultural labor, “put on a jacket” and leave for the cities (*Блонский, 1905: 6*).

However, new economic, political, and cultural challenges forced peasants to reassess their attitudes toward literacy and their children’s education. In addition, the “new” school provided opportunities to learn to read and write even without completing a full course of study. In 1907, more than a third (33.08%) of the total number of literate people were young people aged 10–19 (*Статистический справочник...*, 1910: 6–8). At the same time, the group of children under 10 years old was not included in the calculations, although, according to M. Korf, some children stopped education at the age of 10–14 (*Корф, 1881: 4*). In 1906, in the libraries of the Kyiv Literacy Society, 43% of subscribers were adolescents, and another 19% were children under 12 years old (*Отчет...*, 1907: 35).

Educators and zemstvo’s leaders stated that the main obstacle to the training of peasant children was not even poverty, but the lack of schools, even though their number kept growing (for example, in 1874 in Kherson huberniia there were 140 schools, and in 1905 the number of schools amounted to 532; *Конощенко, 1908: 20*). Parents did not care if their children missed classes because of household chores or domestic problems. They, however, showed a “passionate desire” to have their children enrolled in schools and were very offended if their children did not have enough space in the classroom. In Chernihiv huberniia, classes designed for 25 students were filled with up to 75 people (*С. Р., 1897: 8–9, 11*). In Kherson huberniia, in some places, children sat 5–6 people at a desk, or even on the windows (*Конощенко, 1908: 28*). In 1904, according to incomplete data, only a quarter of all those who wanted to attend schools in this province were enrolled (*Краткий обзор...*, 1908: 26–27). In 1897, 49.1% of school-age children in Tavriia huberniia failed to go to school (*Краткий*

обзор..., 1906: 20, 24). In Podillia huberniia, in the 1908–1909 school year, only 38.4% of school-age children were educated in overcrowded schools (*Начальное...*, 1910: 7, 11). Some peasants studied in small private “literacy schools” or on their own (which was not recorded).

According to writers, the need to educate children was well understood in families that already had literate members, as well as in families in which parents had completely or partially abandoned agricultural labor. The actress Polina Niatko (1900–1994) was lucky that her father combined rural and urban work. After attending a rural parochial school, she continued her studies at a trade school and Mykola Lysenko Music and Drama School in Kyiv. However, even the poorest peasants had hopes for their children’s education. Sometimes they were eager to sacrifice just to give their children the opportunity to change their social status. V. Polischuk’s father sold 1.5 acres of land to hire a tutor for his son (Мовчан, 2015: 291, 323).

The village school graduates interviewed by M. Korf were confident in the usefulness of their reading and writing skills. Those who were literate could check personal and public documents and accounts; understand the law; write a letter; solve financial and economic issues more effectively; receive benefits during military service, etc. Literate people have new ways of making a profit. They could work as teachers, pysars, deliverymen, key keepers, etc. (Корф, 1881: 7–8).

Peasants didn’t have a clear idea of the social prospects for the educated children. Moreover, it was difficult for them to understand the difficulty of intellectual labor. The father of literary critic Oleksandr Vedmitskyi (1894–1961) did not have money for the education of all his sons. After elementary school, he was able to provide further education for only one of them, hoping to “bring him to easy bread”. V. Polischuk’s father did not dare to make him a pysar in the Volost Governance for fear of the debauchery of clerks. V. Polischuk neither saw himself as a farmer nor a priest and was happy to enter the gymnasium. H. Kosynka, on the other hand, first worked as an assistant to a pysar for a crummy salary, and then his father advised him to get an “easy job” as a yard keeper or shoe shiner in the city. In the peasant’s opinion, a literate person should not look for a better job. He burst into tears when he saw his son at that job. In the end, H. Kosynka found a job in Zemstvo. Writer Petro Vanchenko-Ivashenko (1898–1938) had to work in the Volost Governance, then in the office of a local landowner and in city stores. When his “career” was over he returned home at the age of 14. At age 15, he entered secondary school on his own (Мовчан, 2015: 67, 78, 252–253, 333–334).

Anyhow, literate teenagers were “drawn to the cities,” where wider opportunities for individual development and the realization of intellectual potential (in particular, in the field of literature) were opened. A peculiar field of self-expression for peasant children who entered urban educational institutions was participation in the creation of self-made manuscript collections and magazines. In the cities, young people gained new professional experience, earning money by tutoring, doing journalistic activities, working in offices, etc. (Мовчан, 2015: 79, 146, 336).

For young peasant readers, books became their textbooks of life, in which they were looking for normative social models of behavior and self-realization. Teodosii Osmachka (1895–1962) recalled how he wanted to become a fairy-tale hero, a saint, a guardian, and finally a poet (Мовчан, 2015: 293). M. Korf’s respondent, F. Scherbachenko, was once impressed by newspaper descriptions of butter factories. He learned carpentry from books, opened a butter factory, and earned 200 karbovanets a year (Корф, 1881: 7–8). The friend of journalist Spyyrydon Musiiaka (1896–1983) was so fascinated by a book about chiromancers that he quit herding oxen and began to earn money by divination (Мовчан, 2015: 288). Ethnographers recorded cases when peasants, fascinated by the lives of saints, became preachers of religious sects (Ан-ский, 1894: 45, 139).

Education, along with changes in everyday life and training, influenced the formation of peasant children’s ideas about society and their own social position. M. Korf, who asked former schoolchildren about the benefits of literacy, was impressed by the written response of a 14-year-old boy from the Astrakhanka village in Berdiansk uiezd. I. Timofeyev studied for 4 winters and graduated from school at the age of 10. He worked as a shepherd, and this did not prevent him from writing letters, reading the Gospels and the works of the universal classics. He considered the main benefit of reading to be the acquisition of historical knowledge about the lives of great people who were famous for their “useful deeds for the motherland.” Remembering them, he also wanted to be useful so that his name would remain in history (Корф, 1881: 16–18). The trend of the time was the involvement of young people in the political movement. The revolutionary events of 1905–1907 became a turning point. 16-year-old future writer Mykhailo Ivchenko (1890–1939) was deprived of his scholarship in high school for reading political literature to his classmates. In 1905, future poet Yuriy Zhylyko (1898–1938) enjoyed reading revolutionary prints brought home by his parents. The same year the local intelligentsia gathered about 100 rubles for a gifted graduate of a

village school, M. Kulish, to continue his studies at a city school. There he got acquainted with the program of the Social Democrats and in the third form he was already known as a politically unreliable rebel. At the beginning of the revolution, future writer Serhii Pylypenko (1891–1934) “got involved” with the Socialist Revolutionary circles, and in 1908 he became a member of the corresponding Ukrainian party. In 1905, V. Polischuk’s father read political prints to peasants and hid them during searches. His son became familiar with this literature later, but “before 1917” (МОВЧАН, 2015: 194, 223, 260, 308, 331).

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the study of reading as a social phenomenon in the analysis of changes in Ukrainian peasant children’s reading practices at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries allows us to draw the following conclusions. These changes were gradual in nature with regard to the peculiarities of the distribution of household duties between family members; economic problems of peasant families; lack of educational institutions; and the inertia of public perceptions of the social position of the peasantry. The transition period to modern reading practices was protracted. It was characterized by the coexistence of collective and individual, extensive and intensive modes of reading; preservation of the connection between reading and oral culture and church practices. At the same time, there was an increase in the places of family and social life used by peasant children for recitation and silent reading; growth of cognitive and informational functions of reading; and expansion of opportunities for practical application of reading and writing skills. In the context of modernization changes, there was an increase in the pace of peasants’ awareness of the importance of literacy in the future of children. New reading practices contributed to the transformation of the private sphere of young people, personal independence, and individualization of life scenarios.

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