For nearly a millennium the territory and people of Ukraine were subjects of empires from east and west, broken only by brief periods of highly contested independence and statehood in the mid-17th century and in the immediate aftermath of World War I. For more than 300 years much of the country was under the domination and colonial control of the Russian Empire; in the 20th century it was brutally brought into and forcefully subdued within the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991 Ukraine was among the first of its member republics to declare independence.

For centuries the Ukrainian lands were cultural battlegrounds; its people struggled, with various degrees of success and failure, to maintain their cultural identity separate from their colonial masters. The struggle has intensified since independence, as the Russian/Soviet and Ukrainian cultural identities vie for dominance. To a large extent the official government policy towards cultural heritage and identity has wavered from one extreme to the other, but can at best be described as ambivalent; at worst as destructive.

Myron Stachiw will discuss his observations and experiences in Ukraine with cultural heritage issues over the past 24 years, ranging from museums to ethnographic research in the Chornobyl Zone to the state of historic preservation in contemporary Ukraine.

Myron Stachiw received a BA in Anthropology (historical archaeology) from Brown University and an MA from Boston University, American and New England Studies (social history, archaeology, architectural history). Since the early 1970s he has worked in museums and historical agencies such as Old Sturbridge Village, Colonial Williamsburg, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities as a curator, historian, and archaeologist; as a consultant to numerous state and local preservation agencies and museums; and as an adjunct and associate professor of history, architectural history, and historic preservation in universities in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Most recently he served as director of the Fulbright Program in Ukraine (2006-2012). He currently lives in East Woodstock, CT.
Members of an ethnographic expedition to the irradiated territories of the Chernobyl Zone, August 2004. Myron Stachiw, third from right.

Myron Stachiw interviewing residents of the village of Levkovychi in the Chernobyl Zone, Ukraine, August 19, 2004.