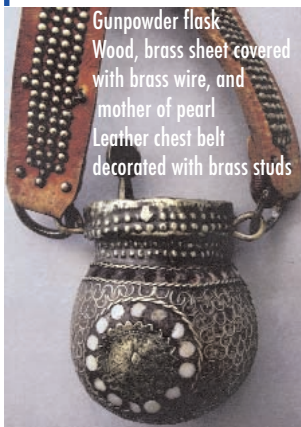


Explore and Experience Our Past at the Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Curator Lubow Wolynetz shares the story of Oleksa Dovbush

When you visit the museum, take a look at a bas-relief, full figure, carved depiction of Oleksa Dovbush on a pear tree board by the folk artisan Vasyl Yakibiuk. The carved portrait is set into a wooden frame which is decorated with simple flat carvings and inlaid with twisted copper wires.

On the back of the portrait the artist wrote the following: “Hutsulshchyna. Kryvorivnia, poshta (postal zone) – Yaseniv Horishnyi, povit (district)



Gunpowder flask
Wood, brass sheet covered
with brass wire, and
mother of pearl
Leather chest belt
decorated with brass studs

Kosiv. Artist woodcarver Vasyl Yakibiuk, son of Hryhori i. March 25, 1937.

The work was apparently donated to the museum by the artist at the time of Father Leo

Chapelsky (first curator of our museum) who was visiting Western Ukraine and

collecting artifacts for the museum.

Oleksa Dovbush (April 28, 1703 – August 23, 1745) was an 18th century Ukrainian folk hero who is often compared to Robin Hood. He was born in the town of Pechenizhyn in the Hutsul region of the Carpathian Mountains. He and his brother organized a band of about 50 young men known as “Opryshky” (outlaws). According to historical facts and many legends, they conducted very successful raids on the manors of the rich, abusive landed aristocrats, robbed them and gave the looted booty to the poor. The Ukrainian peasants’ lot at this time was very oppressive and insufferable due to the many abuses they had to undergo from the non-Ukrainian, rich aristocratic gentry who owned the land and were part of the ruling class.

Oleksa Dovbush became a great

hero whose fame spread throughout the Carpathian Mountains. Military expeditions were organized by the government and the aristocracy against Dovbush. For years he managed to elude captivity, hiding in the numerous mountain caverns, now known as Dovbush Caverns. Finally through the betrayal of a woman, his mistress, he was shot by her husband Stefan Dzvinchuk with a silver bullet since, according to legend, no other bullet would kill him.



In the portrait we see Dovbush dressed in the traditional Hutsul folk costume. He is standing on a rock with a rifle in his hand. Under his arm he has a “topir,” a small hatchet which was used as a weapon. In his wide leather belt the handle of a pistol is seen. Across his chest he has a wide leather belt decorated with metal studs to which a gun-powder flask is attached.

Vasyl Yakibiuk (1865-1945), the author of this portrait, was born in the village of Kryvorivnia. This vil-

lage was known for being a summertime haven for artists, writers, historians from all over Ukraine where they spent their summer vacations. Some of these vacationers rented homes from the Hutsuls, others lived at the parsonage, and still others built their own villas – like Mykhailo Hrushevskyi. Yakibiuk’s home was often frequented by such renowned writers as Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi (the author of “Shadows of our Forgotten Ancestors”).

In our museum collection we have a pistol and a leather belt with a gun-powder flask similar to the one in the portrait and known to be used by Hutsuls as weapons and also as status symbols of valor and gallantry. Both items were made in the early part of the 19th century.



Pistol (Flintlock gun)
Iron, brass and wood with hand-carved ornamentation