

# The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

## TRIITSIA - THE THREE BRANCHED CANDELABRA

by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

In the museum's wood carved items collection we have a number of three-branched candelabra which in the Ukrainian tradition are called *triitsi*. *Triitsi* were used for ritual purposes specifically during the Feast of Epiphany in many areas of Ukraine but they were especially prevalent and its religious and ritual usage preserved up to World War II in the Carpathian and Sub-Carpathian mountain regions - Hutsul and Pokuttia areas. The most artistically interesting *triitsi* were produced by the Hutsuls. According to scholars, ritual usage of the *triitsi* goes back into the



ancient past yet the extant examples of the *triitsi* we have date from the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.

A *triitsia* consisted of a central column with an inverted arch (bow-shaped) topped by a horizontal beam from one end of the arch to the other, with three sockets for the candles. This part was made of one piece of wood. The base, which could be round or square and tiny decorative wooden bells (*darmovysy* or *kohutsi*) attached around the perimeter of the arch, were made of separate pieces of wood. These wooden bells served as noisemakers. In ancient days man used a variety of noisemakers which he at-

tached to his clothing, his livestock, on various items in the home in the belief that this would shoo away evil.



The surface of the arch, pedestal, horizontal beam and candle sockets are usually decorated with simple motifs employing chip carving. But the open area between the arch and the horizontal beam would have a decorative composition, sculpted in the round. It could have a cross, a crucifixion, faces of angels with highly stylized wings, heads of undecipherable beings who some scholars identified as the symbolic representations of the spirits of the ancestors, solar motifs in the shape of a head with rays protruding from it, floral motifs and others. Some *triitsi* were colorfully painted. *Triitsi* for the most part were carved by anonymous folk artisans with little or no artistic training. Most of them were self taught talented individuals. For carving they used home made, primitive and simple tools.



Traditionally, the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of the Epiphany took place in the village church at dawn. After Liturgy the master of each household holding a lit *triitsia* decorated with aromatic herbs, paper flowers, ribbons, in his hand followed by his family would walk down to the river for water blessing. Days before men of the village would cut the ice in the river and carve out of the ice a large cross and an altar where the priest would conduct the water blessing service. What a sight it must have

been when in the dim dawn lights the flickering flames of the *triitsi* candles all over the mountainside would be seen as the men walked from the hilltops down to the river. During the water blessing service the *triitsi* would be submerged in the blessed waters three times and re-lit each time from the candle flames of the altar candelabra.



Following the service, men and women filled their jugs with the blessed water and walked back home with the master of the house guiding the family with his lit *triitsia*. In the olden days people believed that the lit candelabra in the hands of the master of the house not only helped the people get home in the dim dawn light but also guided the spirits of the ancestors to their former homes. The ancient belief claimed that when homage and respect was paid to the ancestral spirits during important holidays then they would be instrumental in bringing good fortune and prosperity to the living. Once home the master of the house would with the smoke from the candle flame make

a cross on the beam of the house and above doorways of all the homestead buildings.

Days later when the priest visited each homestead to bless it with Jordan water, the master of the house greeted the priest with a lit *triitsia* and afterwards led him to the next homestead with his *triitsia* in hand.



Explore and Experience Our Past

CiBaч  Sower January 30, 2011  
25 YEARS