

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Holiday Postcards *by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator*



З Різавом Христавом!

Expressing sentiments of friendship and emotion to friends and family on various special occasions in the form of hand-written personal notes is an age-old tradition. The use of postcards in the presentation of such expressions began towards the end of the 19th century after postal permission had been given for the mailing of cards without envelopes. It quickly became very popular in Germany and Austria; in Eastern European countries, especially Russia and Poland; and in the United States. Because of its widespread usage and the ease with which communication could be undertaken, the postcard, in due course, acquired a wider range of uses; and the depictions on the cards were no longer limited to sentimentally romantic illustrations, but acquired a much wider scope.

The postcard business flourished to such an extent that not only general publishers but also highly specialized ones participated in its production. Competition in the postcard business motivated publishers to engage renowned artists and qualified photographers to supply images representing a wide range of themes for postcard illustrations.

The varied subject matter, artistic quality, and international character of postcards eventually gained the interest of collectors, and postcards became a valuable collector's item. Collecting postcards is considered to be the third most popular hobby after the collecting of stamps (philately) and the collecting of coins, etc. (numismatics). Individual collectors pursue this hobby for a variety of reasons, and often limit their collections to a particular subject, year of production, publisher, national character, etc. Libraries, archives, and historical and genealogical societies, on the other hand, collect postcards on a much broader scale. Postcards can be and are a great source of information for researchers in many fields; and

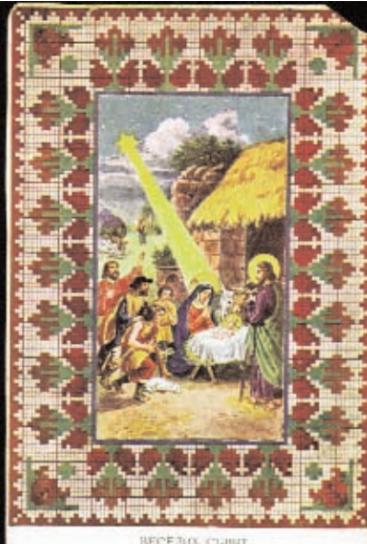
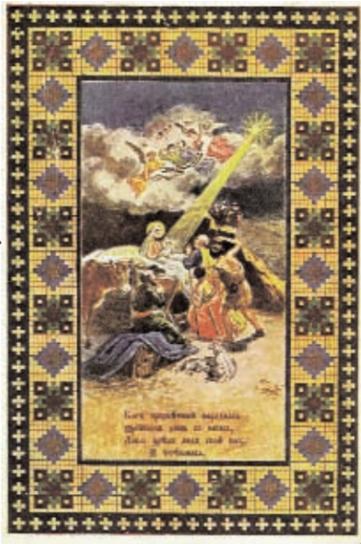
as such they are collected en masse, preserved, and made available to scholars and researchers by the aforementioned institutions.

Our Library is fortunate to have in its archives a sizeable collection of postcards spanning many years and covering many subjects. In this article, however, I will limit myself to the description of vintage postcards in our collection that deal with Christmas themes.

of which, especially those for Easter holidays, have detailed ethnographic character illustrating folk traditions. The postcard entitled Holy Night which portrays the Blessed Mother holding Infant Jesus and walking through a snow covered village street, is from a painting by Yaroslav Pstrak (1878-1916). As a renowned painter in his days and a popular illustrator of books, he was completely forgotten until the late 1950s. During his

lifetime he is credited with supplying 170 of his works to be used for postcard illustrations. Reproduction of paintings on postcards of individual artists can be a valuable reference material in the event that the artist and his works no longer exist. And we had quite a few such cases of destruction during the Stalin purges. The

Postcard production flourished in DP camps. Although post-war conditions were not conducive to high quality publications (lack of good paper, suitable color printers, etc.), nevertheless postcards were produced especially for the Christmas holidays. After the war had ended and the bombing had ceased, the Ukrainian refugees settled more or less into some form of stability in the DP camps. Their thoughts then turned to Ukraine, to the homeland, family, and friends they had left behind, to the struggle for freedom of Ukraine carried on by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska Povstanska Armiia UPA). These thoughts, reflections, and longings invariably inspired artists to imbue illustrations for postcards with such concepts. On one card we see children caroling to UPA soldiers who are camped in a snow-covered forest. Another card depicts UPA soldiers quietly celebrating Christmas Eve in their hideaway. Still another card depicts a UPA soldier lying in a snow-covered forest clearing, on sentry duty with rifle in hand, who catches sight of the Star of Beth-

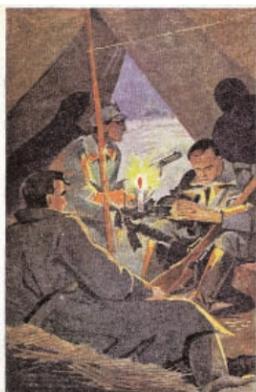


The first group of postcards was published before and between the two World War years with Nativity scenes of unknown artistic source. The distinguishing Ukrainian characteristic of these cards, besides the printed greeting in Ukrainian "Veselykh Sviat", "Z Rizdvom Sviatym!", is a traditional folk embroidery design enclosing the centrally-placed Nativity scene. The use of embroidery designs as borders around a centrally-placed illustration was a favorite decoration. Postcards with such motifs served a twofold purpose: The recipient not only received a holiday greeting, but also an embroidery design that could easily be copied unto cloth. In those years Ukrainian folk embroidery was not only a favorite pastime of Ukrainian women but served as an important and obvious mark of national identity. For this reason its preservation, promotion, and application into modern usage and settings was essential. Postcards with such designs fulfilled those aims and needs.

Another group of pre-war and inter-war postcards would be those which present paintings of individual Ukrainian artists. The postcards depicting The Three

only evidence that a particular work existed can sometimes be found only in postcard reproductions.

Dreaming of Saint Nicholas leaving gifts is from a painting by Antin Manastyrsky (1878-1969) a noted Galician painter and graphic artist. He was known for his



Kings is from a painting by the artist Olena Kulchytska (1877-1967). Many of her paintings have been used as illustrations for postcards some

children's story books and illustrations for primers. He also produced historical paintings, many of which were used for postcards in the 1910s and 1920s. Next are a series of postcards by Mykola Anastazievsky (1891-1974). As a realist painter, graphic artist and pedagogue, he produced a series of greeting cards in Ukraine, in Displaced Persons Camps in Nuremberg, Germany and later in the United States. The four black and white cards he produced in DP camps

lehem and realizes it's Christmas. One card uses traditional Ukrainian Christmas and national symbols; A sheaf of wheat – symbol of the ancestors with a rifle tied to its midriff; a kolach (Christmas bread) with a lit candle on the table; a Trident – symbol of Ukraine; and a branch of a guelderrose (kalyna). As to the identity of the artist of these cards we do not know for certain since the cards were not signed. We can only deduce as to his identity. Most probably the cards were the works of Edward Kozak (EKO) (1902-1992).

Recipients of postcards with such illustrations, were most likely reminded of their homeland, their traditions, their heritage, their past, and thus became imbued with hopefulness, expectations, and faith.

Postcards, and especially vintage postcards, give us an abundance of information for personal enrichment and especially for research and study.



Explore and Experience Our Past