A few years ago, our Museum received a unique gift from a lady from Montreal – a large quilt composed of fragments of embroidery from the sleeves of women’s shirts from the Bukovyna region. The Bukovyna region is situated between Ukraine and Romania. The northern part is in Ukraine and is the main part of the Chernivtsi oblast. The southern part is in Romania. Historically, Bukovyna was a part of the Kievan-Rus and Halych-Volyn kingdoms, but after the 14th century it underwent many political changes and was a part of different kingdoms and ruled by different occupiers. It became a part of the Moldavian kingdom, then under the Ottoman rule a Turkish province then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From 1918 to 1940 it was a part of Romania. The population of Bukovyna up to World War II was mixed – Ukrainians, Romanians, Hungarians, Jews, Moldovans, Poles, Germans, and Gypsies. Some inter-cultural influences took place and are apparent; nevertheless, each ethnic group tried to preserve its own heritage and cultural characteristics and in many cases did so until World War II.

In the aftermath of the World War II peace talks, Bukovyna was divided between Ukraine and Romania. The city of Chernivtsi, for many years the main political, religious, and cultural center of Bukovyna, became the capital of the Ukrainian Bukovyna region – the Chernivtsi oblast.

During the years that Bukovyna was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, there developed among the educated and intelligentsia an interest in the folk culture of the various ethnic groups in the Empire. This interest was also characterized by the Bukovynian women. Because of the dire economic conditions at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the Bukovyna region and elsewhere, village women would come to the city of Chernivtsi and at street markets or during city fairs would sell their creations – earthenware pottery, woven textiles, embroidered items, especially shirts. Osypa Hrybornych went to such markets and fairs regularly and bought old, worn, tattered shirts, but with the embroidery intact. The sleeves of a Ukrainian folk shirt were always decorated with especially rich and elaborate embroidery designs and Bukovynian shirts in particular. These ornaments were symbols of the Tree of Life. Osypa used parts of the embroidered shirts which we do not know what to do with, especially if they are tattered and worn out. I know gifts to her children and grandchildren. The large quilt which our Museum received was her creation and was donated to our Museum by Osypa’s granddaughter Stephania Zwonok from Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

The creator of the donated quilt referred to above was Osypa (nee Maier) Hrybornych who was born 1886 and who lived in the city of Chernivtsi, Bukovyna region. She grew up and lived in times when interest in traditional folk art was paramount. As a talented artisan, especially in needle arts such as knitting, crocheting, and embroidery, it naturally followed that she should have developed a regard for and attentiveness to folk art. Her particular type of expertise made her appreciate the various forms of folk art creatively produced by the peasant populace of Bukovyna. She was especially attracted to the embroidered shirts worn by the Bukovynian women. Of the dire economic conditions at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, there developed among the educated and intelligentsia an interest in the folk culture of the various ethnic groups in the Empire. This interest was also characterized by the Bukovynian women. Because of the dire economic conditions at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the Bukovyna region and elsewhere, village women would come to the city of Chernivtsi and at street markets or during city fairs would sell their creations – earthenware pottery, woven textiles, embroidered items, especially shirts. Osypa Hrybornych went to such markets and fairs regularly and bought old, worn, tattered shirts, but with the embroidery intact. The sleeves of a Ukrainian folk shirt were always decorated with especially rich and elaborate embroidery designs and Bukovynian shirts in particular. These ornaments were symbols of the Tree of Life. Osypa used parts of the embroidered shirts which we do not know what to do with, especially if they are tattered and worn out. I know gifts to her children and grandchildren. The large quilt which our Museum received was her creation and was donated to our Museum by Osypa’s granddaughter Stephanie Zwonok from Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

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