

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

PRESERVING FOR POSTERITY

by *Lubow Wolynetz, Curator*

One of the most important and perhaps the most challenging aspect of work which museum and libraries do is the processing and preservation of their many-faceted collections. Its purpose is to make these collections available for exhibitions, study, research, and usage by present day individuals or by anyone in the far future interested or in need of specified information and illustrative materials. The scope of such collections depends on the defined policy of the institution. Many world nations have national libraries, national museums, national historical societies which serve as repositories of information for those countries. Thus, they preserve their national heritage in whatever mode it comes. Their goal is to collect everything and anything that can inform

Ukraine also has its national libraries, museums, repositories which, sadly to say, have not fared as well as in other civilized countries. Existence under foreign domination for centuries left its devastating mark. Under Soviet occupation much was wantonly destroyed or burned during suspicious fires for which no one has ever been brought to justice.

But, what about the Ukrainian Diaspora? What have we done to preserve the historic memory of Ukrainian immigration in America; the history of their exodus from their homeland; the travails of their displacement; the accomplishments they have made in their adopted country? True, much has already been written, but just as much has been lost. For decades, Ukrainian immigrants in America did not have a repository for materials and artifacts where these could be preserved for posterity. Each organization, publisher, and society kept their records individually. If the Institutions ceased to exist, their records met various fates. Some were preserved privately; many ended up in the garbage. In spite of the fact that we now have a few institutions like our Museum and Library and a few others which serve as repositories for all kinds of works, materials, and

was folk art items or family memorabilia, photographs, and the like. This dilemma many of us face when we are downsizing or trying to prepare a will, so as not to leave the burden of disposition and decision making to survivors or executors.

Lately, the obvious materials like books and archival records have been deposited for safekeeping with various repositories

which we have in the United States and Canada. But my concern is with materials that are considered to be ephemera. These would be the following: postcards, photographs, posters, concert programs, decals, souvenirs commemorating various activities and anniversaries, organizational badges, minutes of meetings of ad hoc committees, yes and even recordings, especially 78 records produced by the first and second wave of Ukrainian immigrants in America, and much more. These items are the first ones to be discarded. This is unfortunate because it is precisely items such as these that enhance and enrich written historical texts, which without illustrative materials are often flat and colorless.

As examples of such ephemera, I give you just a modest sampling: a photograph of a Liner on which Evdokiya Kruchowa from Berezhovysia Velyka, Ternopil region came to America in September 1913; an envelope addressed to Stephen Shumeyko, 1908-1962, the first editor of the *Ukrainian Weekly* (1933-1958) from the Ukrainian Pavilion at the World's Fair entitled Century of Progress which was held in Chicago 1933-

1934. The building of the Ukrainian Pavilion by the Ukrainian community in America is a fascinating story in itself. Many souvenirs were made for that occasion, but very few have survived because of indifference and neglect; badges of members of church brotherhoods; membership certificate of Ukrainian Workingmen's Association; a leaflet calling all to a protest march regarding the starvation of Ukrainians by the communist regime. Just on the basis of these images, not only interesting stories could be written, but also indefinite facts could be confirmed.

Ephemeral items such as these help to illustrate the written reconstruction of the past, its people, its places. Images



and elucidate their nation's past.

Naturally, there are smaller institutions and private individuals with collections devoted to a specific subject or object. Often, a family member will appoint himself as the steward for the preservation of the family history and its heirlooms. All of these endeavors are necessary for the safeguarding of works and materials deemed to be an important part of the cultural legacy of national and ethnic groups, and thus to be of great service for future generations.

artifacts, we still hear of many cases where items of this nature end up at flea markets or in the Dumpsters. In the Ukrainian Weekly January 11th, 2015 article entitled *The Fate of Objects*, Dr. Andrew Sorokowski writes about what we should do with the various things that we have collected and treasured, whether it



evoked emotions, a deeper understanding of events, awaken interest in pertinent issues of those times, and even stimulate us to action. This is why items of such nature are so important to preserve. Let's not discard any of them but preserve, share, and reanimate the past through visual imagery. Hence, if you have ephemeral items of Ukrainian vintage, please bring or send them to our Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, 161 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06902-3092. Thank you.



Explore and Experience Our Past