

## EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

## Another Gift—Another Mystery

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

Items for our Museum and Library are continuously enriched by purchases, outright gifts, and bequests. A few years ago, from the Ursula and Ostap Balaban Estate, our Museum and Library received a substantial number of items, namely the following: art works of notable Ukrainian artists; 18th and 19th century icons; carved, painted, and inlaid furniture pieces; embroideries; ceramics; and a shadow box—a diorama depicting, in miniature, the interior of an 18th century wealthy Cossack's home and family members. It is about this diorama that I shall write.

Ursula and Ostap Balaban were avid art collectors, and actively engaged in the cultural life of the Ukrainian community in New York City and its cultural institutions which they generously and financially supported. Their home, which could be described as a small, but distinct private museum, was filled with a significant collection of artifacts,

both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian. Being childless, Ursula and Ostap decided that upon their death, their collection should be distributed among the cultural institutions which preserve Ukrainian heritage for posterity. In their will, they made detailed lists of all the artifacts, specifying which items should go to which institution, and then left it to the executor of their will to carry out their wishes. Our Museum and Library was fortunate to be included in the will of Ursula and Ostap, and thus received a substantial part of their items.

The diorama which I am writing about is again another artifact of mystery. Ursula and Ostap purchased the diorama at an antique shop. The sellers could not tell them who made it, or who brought it to their shop for sale. They knew nothing about it, but accepted it because of the superb quality of workmanship of the item.

Although there are full-size

replica dioramas, as a rule, dioramas are three-dimensional scale models, illustrating historical or fictional scenes or events, natural history, nature, cultural scenes, and many other subjects. Dioramas serve simultaneously as a teaching tool, widely used in educational systems, and as entertainment. Both creating and collecting dioramas has been and still is a highly popular hobby.

The diorama which we received from the Balaban Estate is a three-sided rectangular box, with a beamed ceiling and a hardwood floor. The front opening has a glass wall for the protection of the interior. The interior consists of the following: an icon corner; table, and benches around it; a long, elaborately decorated dowry chest; a cabinet for dishes; a window with flower pots; a wooden shelf on the wall above the table with a candlestick; a colonel's mace, and beneath it a fancy sabre attached to the wall; also some

household implements and a hand-carved wooden mangle board for pressing linen cloth; etc. There are some textiles and earthenware dishes placed randomly around the room. The room is occupied by five persons – two adult women, a young girl, a Cossack (by the look of his attire, probably a colonel) and a minstrel playing on a bandura. What is striking about this diorama is the detailed precision of its execution, in order to present as authentic as possible a specific historic era. The attire of the personages is without question accurate in accordance with historic description; it was reproduced to perfection as to style, tailoring, choice of fabrics, and relevancy to the social class of the wearer. To recreate an accurate replica of this era, a person must have done careful and thorough research. One important historical source about the life and traditions of the Cossacks is a book by Alexander Riegelman, 1720-1789, entitled *A Chronicle*

*Account of Little Russia and its People and the Cossacks in General*, written in 1785-86, with a supplement describing the Ukrainian people, their lifestyle, and traditions. The supplement included 28 drawings of Ukrainian types of different social classes in the dress of that era. The drawings were done by Tymofii Kalynsky, 1740?-1809. Riegelman, a descendant of German aristocrats living in Russia, was a military engineer and a topographer. He had assignments in the Zaporizhzhia region and various areas in Southern Ukraine working on the demarcation of borders, drawing up plans for Ukrainian cities, building fortified lines, etc. This source might have been used by our mysterious producer of this diorama.

As to who was the creator of this exquisite diorama, this will probably remain a mystery. What prompted the person to illustrate this specific era with perfection and devotion? For whom was this diorama intended? Did the idea to do this come to the person who had read the historical novel *The Black Council* by Panteleimon Kulish, 1819-1897? Actually, the interior scene of a wealthy Cossack's home in this diorama is very similar to the description of the home of Cossack Cherevan in a chapter from Kulish's book.

We can make only general assumptions as to why and as to what source material was used for making of this diorama. Nevertheless, without hesitation we can say that the artistry, craftsmanship, and skillfulness with which it was produced truly makes it a gem. Thanks to the foresight of Ursula and Ostap in preparing a will, precisely indicating the recipients of their art collection—Our Museum and Library is once again enriched by this, a singular gift! ❖



*A diorama, an 18th century wealthy Cossack's home, a gift of the Ursula and Ostap Balaban Estate, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford*

The Board of Directors of the  
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford  
cordially invite You to

a Testimonial Banquet honoring

**LUBOW K. WOLYNETZ**

our dedicated curator for thirty-five years,  
2018 recipient of the Order of Princess Olga  
awarded by President Petro Poroshenko of Ukraine

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2018**

Cocktails – 4:00 p.m. Dinner – 5:00 p.m.

The Knights of Columbus Council #41 Center  
509 Shippan Avenue, Stamford, Connecticut

Ticket - \$100 per person

Telephone Reservations no later than November 5:  
203-969-4378

Please make check payable to:  
The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford  
161 Glenbrook Road,  
Stamford, CT 06902



During his visit to the United States, President Petro Poroshenko presented high state awards in a meeting with leaders of the Ukrainian community in the United States on September 25, 2018. Among those honored was Mrs. Lubow Wolynetz, who received the Order of Princess Olga, for her merits and contributions to the cultural life of the Ukrainian community in the metropolitan area.

Congratulations pani Lubow!

Photo credit: Peter Shmigel