

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

A Rare Publication by a Unique Individual

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An apron from Yavoriv region,
The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

Museums periodically supplement their collections with new acquisitions. With each new acquired item the museum not only enriches its collection, but often discovers interesting facts about the given item. It learns of its provenance, its past, accounts of the people who were the owners of the item, etc. The history of the obtained artifact is sometimes more interesting than the object itself. A thorough study, research, and documentation of every artifact is a requirement museums adhere to which often requires time consuming and detailed detective work. Even the most fragmentary detail is important and should be preserved for further study. An artifact without a documentation is just another artifact in the collection, but with a detailed history it becomes more valuable and more fascinating.

In our Museum's folk art collection, we have an embroidered apron from the Yavoriv region of Ukraine with an original history. The small region of Yavorivshchyna did not have the necessary means for the development of large scale farming. It concentrated on the development of home industry. They opened a toy making trade school, a school of drawn thread embroidery and lace making, and the production of block printing textiles. Folk costumes of Yavoriv differed from the costumes of neighboring areas by using white linen or hemp cloth for the various parts of the attire and employing specific embroidery and drawn thread-work stitches. Of special interest were the Yavoriv aprons. Their ornamental varieties were decorated with a select number of motifs with a combination of drawn thread work embroidered using a pale red and waxed linen threads. They produced a unique and aesthetically pleasing look. The

apron in question was part of a personal collection of Volodymyr Shukhevych, 1849-1915 – a notable ethnographer, community leader, pedagogue and publicist. Besides work as head of various social, educational and cultural associations, he also dedicated his life to the collection, study, and preservation of ethnographic materials and art works of the Ukrainian people. His five-volume study of the Hutsul people, (*Hutsulshchyna*), published in 1897-1908 to this day is without parallel. Shukhevych valued and loved folk art and transmitted this love and interest to his children. He donated most of his collection to the National Museum in Lviv, while some items were left for his family as heirlooms. The Yavoriv apron was given to his daughter Daria Starosolska, 1881-1941, a pianist. She was a professor of piano and music at the M. Lysenko Music Institute in Lviv from 1907-1940. With the coming of the Soviet occupation, members of the Starosolska family were arrested and imprisoned. Daria's husband Volodymyr, 1878-1942 – community leader, political activist, noted defense attorney, was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment. He died from starvation in the Mariinsk prison in Siberia. Daria, her daughter Uliana, 1912-2011, a journalist and writer, and son Ihor, 1908-1988, an architect and restorer of architectural monuments, were exiled to Kazakhstan to hard labor. During the arrest, the family was given less than a half hour to pack. In the panic and fear, they quickly packed whatever was on hand and somehow, the Yavoriv apron ended up among the packed items.

After settling in Kazakhstan, while living in a damp place made from unbaked clay bricks, they tried

to somehow live and work. The mother became seriously ill and lay on a straw mat in bed by the wall. In order to somehow take out the chill from the cold wall, the daughter and son opened up the gathers in the Yavoriv apron and hung it on the wall next to their mother's bed. The mother died on this makeshift bed facing the embroidered wall hanging.

Some years later, the Soviet government issued a political amnesty. Some of the incarcerated and exiled were partially pardoned. Uliana was able to go to Poland, where she lived for a few years and later emigrated to America. In America, she immersed herself in the Ukrainian community, its cultural and literary world. She became editor of the Ukrainian Woman's League of America Journal (UNWLA) *Our Life*. In the headquarter offices of UNWLA in New York, the editor had her office also. Every Saturday, in the meeting hall of the office, every Saturday embroidery courses were held of which I was the instructor. Uliana, whom we called Pani Lasia, often came to look at our work. With care, tenderness and fondness, she inspected the embroideries from different regions of Ukraine, the samplers with various stitches, and watched the students make progress. One day she came and gave me a present – the Yavoriv apron, the one which traveled with her from Ukraine to Kazakhstan to America. She told me the whole story about it and asked that I preserve this family heirloom for posterity, which I did by making it part of the Folk art collection of our Ukrainian Museum in Stamford.

A single museum artifact with such unbelievable history and such deep symbolic meaning! ❖



Fragment. The "Kazakhstan" apron (more pictures in the Ukrainian section).
The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford