

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

FOLK ART COLLECTION AT OUR MUSEUM (Part Three) by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

In order to develop further her folk art museum at a girls' high school of the Basilian Sisters in Lviv, and after her trip to America to help in the organization of a Ukrainian Museum in Stamford, Sr. Severine Parylle, OSBM, used a variety of means to accomplish her goal.

From the memoirs of her former students we learn some of the details of these efforts. In her days, it was customary for students to spend their summer vacations not in the city but in the country. So, in summertime they would be with family, friends, or even at parsonages which were equipped for and welcomed vacationers, in the various villages of western Ukraine. Being well aware of this, Sister Severine, at the end of the school semester, gave all her students an assignment. They were to acquaint themselves with the village life, traditions, folk costumes, etc. where they were vacationing, and in the fall bring back to school samples of embroideries, parts of folk costumes, and any folk art items from that particular region.

In the memoirs of one of her students, Tatjana Krynytzky, this is what Sister more or less said: "When you go back to your village... and you catch anyone discarding an old piece of clothing, a well-worn or torn embroidered shirt – grab it; and when you go to church and find 'accidentally' in the corner of the choir balcony the old carved cross full of dust – bring it to me. There it would be lost, here it will be preserved for all to see and admire." Ms. Krynytzky continues with this observation: "Mother Severine begged, demanded, cajoled, and nearly blackmailed everyone under and many beyond her sphere

of influence. After every holiday or summer recess,



Embroidery samples from different regions of Ukraine from the T. Krynytzky gift.

she greeted her students at the threshold of the school, looking for gifts. Not many dared to return empty-handed."

Items thus collected enriched her museum's holdings, and at the same time those items she sent to Stamford became the basic folk art collection of the future Ukrainian Museum and Library in Stamford. In her letter to the first curator of our Museum, Fr. Leo Chapelsky, Sister writes as follows: "I am extremely happy that my dream is not just a dream but slowly becoming a reality, and on the American soil there will be a Ukrainian Museum. Such an objective is worth the hard effort and I must admit that I will do my utmost to satisfy Your Excellency (Bishop Constantine Bohachevsky) and you Rev. Fr. (Fr. Leo Chapelsky). I sought the advice of specialists and we all approve of the plans that you have made."

In 1939 the Soviet army invaded Western Ukraine. Arrests of bishops, priests, nuns, and in-



tellecuals were the first actions on the Soviet agenda. Sister Severine realized that her museum and her future were uncertain. As a result she transferred a large part of her museum's collection to the Lviv Enlightenment Society, hoping that it would survive there. But many smaller items, like embroidery samples, she donated for safekeeping to some of her former co-workers and students. One such collection of embroideries Sister Severine gave to Tatjana's mother when she with Tatjana came to bid farewell before escaping to the West. It is an amazing act of devotion on the part of Tatjana's mother, who throughout the war years – constantly moving from one city to another, escaping bombings, destruction, not knowing what the next day would bring and if they would survive – always took along the embroidery samples that Sister Severine had given her for safekeeping. These items which Ms. Krynytzky inherited from her mother, she brought to America where for years she carefully and lovingly preserved them. In time Ms. Krynytzky decided that the appropriate place for her embroidery treasures would be an institution where they could be preserved, displayed, and viewed by wider audiences. Hence she decided to donate them to the Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, and, actually did so in the year 2005.

¹Severine is an alternate spelling of Severyna. A sister who is the superior can be also referred to as Mother.

²Krynytzky, Tatjana, "Mother Severyna's Mission: Ukrainian Embroidery" in *Piecework*, May/June, 1994, pp. 26-27.

³Sister Severyna's letter to Reverend Leo Chapelsky, dated November 15, 1935, Lviv.

⁴Krynytzky, Tatjana, "To Leave My Acquired Knowledge" in *Piecework*, May/June, 1994, pp. 28-29, 32, 36.

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The Sower
September 25, 2011