

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY TREASURES *by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator*

In the month of November Ukrainians traditionally pay homage and honor the memory of the Sich Riflemen (Ukrainski Sichovi Striltsi) – the first Ukrainian military formation in the 20th century. It was later reorganized into the Ukrainian Galician Army.

For their acts of valor and deeds of heroism the Sich Riflemen will always be deemed as the modern day knights who fought for the freedom and independence of Ukraine during the years of World War I. They left for posterity not only a rich historical legacy of military accomplishments, but also invaluable cultural contributions in art, music, and literature.

In our Museum we are fortunate to have the works of two members of the Sich Riflemen: the paintings of the artist Ivan Kuchmak (1899-1977) and the musical scores of the composer and conductor Mykhailo Haivoronsky (1892-1949).

Ivan Kuchmak was born in the Podillia area of western Ukraine. Even as a student in high school he was interested in art. His studies, however, were interrupted by World War I. He joined the Sich Riflemen, and as he himself said “traded the artist’s paintbrush for the army rifle,” but he did not abandon his paintbrush for very long. Throughout the many war battles and rig-

orous army life which he endured, he made sketches of what he had witnessed, many of which would later serve as material for his large oil canvasses. After the War he completed his artistic studies in Krakow. But because of political persecution, he immigrated to Canada in 1926, and then to the United States in the 1930s.

The subject of his artistic work deals mostly with war, battle scenes, and army life in its both tragic and glorious moments. He also did portraits of notable officers of the Sich Riflemen, one of which we have in our Museum. It is the portrait of the composer Mykhailo Haivoronsky. While living in America Ivan Kuchmak worked as a commercial artist, as a theater and film decorator, and as a painter of churches.

There is a very interesting story about him as a film decorator. In 1937 when the Ukrainian Film Corporation decided to make the film *Marusia* (which was produced and

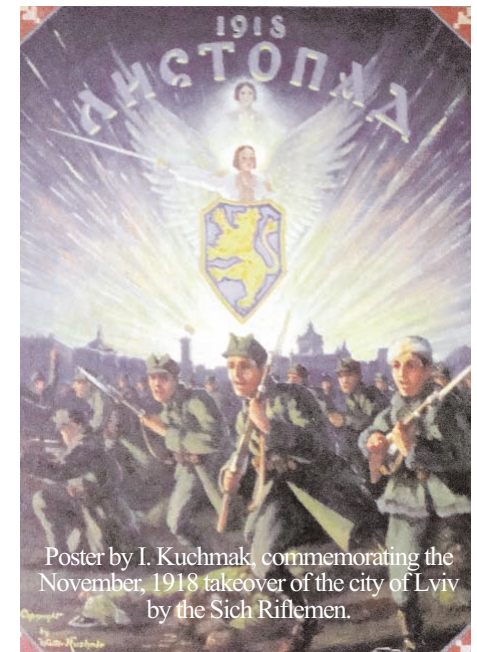
shown in 1938) they needed to build a typical Ukrainian village with whitewashed houses, thatched roofs, flower gardens, etc. Ivan Kuchmak was asked to undertake this project. So, he organized a brigade of workers, many of whom had been his friends from the War and had served as fellow Sich Riflemen. Eventually, he located a farm in Plainfield, New Jersey with a perfect landscape for the building of the village. For two months the brigade of builders lived on this farm, slept in the haylofts of the barns, and built the village under the direction of Ivan Kuchmak. In the evenings after a hard day’s work all the builders would sit around a bonfire and throughout the night would

sing popular Sich Riflemen songs, many of which had been composed by Mykhailo Haivoronsky. The local farmers and residents of Plainfield would often drive up to hear the beautiful singing.

The composer and conductor Mykhailo Haivoronsky was born in the town of Zalishchyky, western Ukraine. He completed his musical studies at the M. Lysenko Higher Institute of Music in Lviv. Later, he taught music at this Institute and organized and conducted various choirs. As a soldier in the Ukrainian Sich Riflemen, he organized their army band and conducted it from 1914-1919. He immigrated to the United States in 1923 and became very active in the cultural life of Ukrainian immigrants. In 1930 he founded and conducted the United Ukrainian Chorus. His musical compositions consisted of folk song arrangements,



Sich Riflemen in a Snowstorm on their way to Battle



Poster by I. Kuchmak, commemorating the November, 1918 takeover of the city of Lviv by the Sich Riflemen.

choral works, church music, and instrumental works for violin, string orchestras, and bands. But, he is best known for his Sich Riflemen songs which are popular even to this day. They have had a great revival in Ukraine, because during the Soviet occupation these songs had been banned and forbidden.

In our Museum we have a number of musical scores for these songs arranged for solo and choir singing. They were printed in the 1930s in western Ukraine at the Basilian press in the city of Zhovkva, but published as the Ukrainian Music Edition of New York. Among the songs we find the following: *Synia chichka* (The Blue Flower), *Oi, vpav strilets* (The Soldier has Fallen), *Ykhav strilets na viionku* (The Rifleman was Going to War), *Ide sichove viisko* (The Sich Army is Coming), *Oi, nahnusia dub vysokyi* (The Tall Oak Tree has Bent) and many, many others. We are thus the recipients of a rich musical legacy.



Returning Home After the War (oil on canvas)

Explore and Experience Our Past

The Sower
November 27, 2011