

PHOTOGRAPHS AS DOCUMENTS by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

There is an old adage which states that “a picture is worth a thousand words”, and this is so! Photographs not only illustrate a particular event as an addition to a written record, but also document an event visually. They both complement and supplement a record, enhance its meaning, and help to tell a story much better. Occasionally, photographs are the only source of evidence that something existed or took place. Photographs are a unique source of information which at times provide powerful impacts, and as such should be collected, preserved, and made available for study and research. A



careful, detailed reading of a photograph may at times reveal more information than a written narrative.

Our Museum and Library has a sizable collection of over 4,000 photographs which have been catalogued, and an-

other 2,000 which are undergoing processing. The subject matter of these photographs cover a wide range of organizational, public, and personal activities. They document people, buildings, exhibitions, meetings, concerts, artifacts, and much, much more. Since our Museum and Library as a cultural institution is part of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Stamford, it only follows that a substantial percentage of the subject matter of our photographic collection deals with church-related activities.

From the early years of immigration to America, Ukrainian women took part and were active in various civic and church organizations. They performed diverse functions from organizing dances, concerts, staging plays, singing in choirs, arranging exhibits, and so forth. They were especially active in trying to acquaint the American public with Ukrainians and Ukrainian culture. Hence, wherever an opportunity occurred, they mounted exhibits of Ukrainian folk, fine and religious art, organized concerts, and dance performances.

As an example of the historical and informative value photographs present, I have chosen a few which illustrate a particular event that occurred in New York City on April 12-25th, 1913. Apparently, there existed an American-Catholic Society in New York City which performed various services for Catholics. In 1913 this Society organized the first benefit exhibit for Catholics of different nations.

This took place in the 12th Regiment Armory building on 62nd Street. A representative of the Society contacted Ukrainians through St. George Church, and a Ruthenian (Ukrainian) Ladies Committee of the United Catholic Exhibit was formed. This Committee collected from private individuals and from St. George Church many artifacts, which displayed Ukrainian folk art, especially embroideries, church and priest's vestments, etc. Each organization participating in the exhibit had a booth where its items were displayed. The Ukrainian booth had a large sign above the displayed items which read: Ruthenian Greek Catholic Societies. This can be seen on one of the photographs. The Ukrainian daily Svoboda in the April, 1913, no. 16 issue wrote about the exhibit in its news column. From this notice we learn that the exhibit was open from 7pm to 12 midnight every evening, and that April 16th was designated as Ukrainian Day. Entrance fee was 25 cents. As to what kind of program Ukrainians organized on the 16th, sadly to say, we do not know, because we could not find a write-up about it in the many sources we perused.

The Ukrainian Committee consisted of ten young ladies: K. Dub, M. Mokrij, J. Klymko, P. Shevchynska, J. Shevchynska, M. Skubova, J. Jarema, K. Shevchynska, M. Kostecka, A. Petrowska. Mrs. M. Rey, served as the liaison from the American-Catholic Exhibit Committee.

The two persons on the Committee whose names are familiar are Maria Skubova and J. Jarema. Maria Skubova emigrated to the United States in 1907 and was active in the Ukrainian community in New

York City, especially in women's organizations. She returned to Ukraine in 1914 and served as a nurse in the Austrian army. In 1921 she returned to the United States and continued with her community work, establishing women's clubs, organizing folk art exhibits, organizing aid for Ukrainian refugees in DP camps, helping newly-arrived immigrants to the United States, etc. The second familiar name is J. Jarema. It is unknown whether she was the sister, wife, or daughter of Peter Jarema, the first Ukrainian undertaker in New York City.

The photograph of the Ruthenian Ladies Committee was donated to our Museum and Library by Maria and Oleh Gelety June 16th, 1992.

These photographs document only one event which the early Ukrainian immigrants to America organized and participated in, and about which very little was written. But, the images themselves tell us much. Fortunately for us, two persons were wise enough to save and donate them to our institution which preserves them for posterity.



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