

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

TARAS SHEVCHENKO - COMMEMORATIVE CELEBRATIONS

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

Commemorative celebrations dedicated to the anniversary dates of the birth or death of Taras Shevchenko, 1814-1861, have always played a vital role in Ukrainian cultural and political life, both in Ukraine and in the Diaspora. Ukrainian people, no matter where they were or in what circumstances they found themselves, never forgot to pay homage to their great-

strive to present programs which would acquaint the non-Ukrainian public with Taras Shevchenko - his life, works, and significance.

In the past, there have been Shevchenko anniversary celebrations, both glorious and sorrowful ones. In eastern Ukraine the tsarist Russian

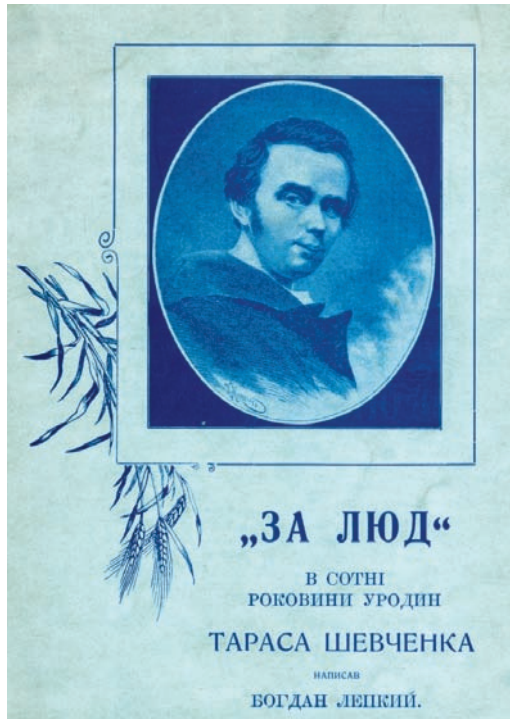
description given in the June 4th issue of *Svoboda*. Unfortunately, I was not able to find any photographs of this event.

Since 1914 was officially proclaimed as the Shevchenko Year, celebrations in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv lasted from March to the end of June. The highlight of the Lviv celebration was a spectacular

a poster depicting the participants of the Shevchenko manifestation in Lviv in 1914, quite a few photographs of the parade itself, and publications printed specially on the occasion of the centennial celebration.

On the same day that the Lviv celebration took place, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo,

govern-



est poet, artist, teacher, martyr. His life and works served as a guiding light in all aspects of national rebirth, in the preservation of our national identity, and in the struggle for independence. Indeed, it was an inspiration and a constant reminder to perpetuate his *Testament*!

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Taras Shevchenko and 2014 has been designated as the Shevchenko Year. Ukrainians in their homeland and in the Diaspora have been preparing a wide and diversified range of activities (exhibitions, concerts, lectures, scholarly publications, new editions of Shevchenko's works) to pay tribute to their bard and prophet in a lofty, deserving, and dignified manner. Ukrainian communities in the Diaspora, in addition to the aforementioned plans, also

ment often prohibited any patriotic display honoring Shevchenko in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, as well as in other major cities of eastern Ukraine. This occurred during the 50th anniversary of Shevchenko's death (1911) and during the 100th anniversary of his birth (1914).

Ironically, Ukrainians living in St. Petersburg and Moscow were allowed to commemorate these anniversary dates, but not in Shevchenko's homeland. To counteract such cruel and hostile acts of the Russian tsarist government, Ukrainians in western Ukraine and in the United States succeeded in preparing a magnificent and inspiring celebration in 1914 honoring the 100th anniversary of Shevchenko's birth. In the March 28, 2010 issue of the *Sower*, I wrote about the Shevchenko celebration in New York City based on a detailed



parade down the streets of Lviv which took place on June 28, 1914. Various Ukrainian cultural, military, youth, and sports associations and clubs who had branches in many cities and towns of western Ukraine organized their members to participate in this manifestation. There were over twelve thousand participants. The motto

of the march was "Get up and break your chains", words from Shevchenko's *Testament*. Among the marchers were members of such organizations as *Sich*, *Sokil*, and *Plast*. Some commanding officers of these organizations rode on horseback units. Hundreds of female members of the *Sokil* organization marched in folk costumes. There were 19 marching bands and close to 150 flags. This was the first time that 500 members of the *Sichovi Striltsi* (Sharpshooters) marched in uniforms and arms, and thus for the first time were presented to the Ukrainian people as a military unit. After the parade in the city's sports arena, members of these organizations and especially the *Sichovi Striltsi* demonstrated an array of gymnastic and military maneuvers.

In our Museum and Library we have

and soon after World War I began. The *Sichovi Striltsi*, as well as other young men who marched in the Lviv Shevchenko celebration, were the first ones to sign up in the Austrian army to fight the tsarist Russian army and to free Ukraine from foreign occupiers. Just as the political situation at the time of the centennial celebration of Shevchenko's birth brought about attempts of the Ukrainian people to fight for their freedom and independence; similarly, on the eve of the bicentennial commemoration of Shevchenko's birth, beginning in November 2013, the Ukrainian people and especially the Ukrainian youth came out on the Maidan in Kyiv en masse. They did so for noble causes and ideals: to protest the unlawful acts of their corrupt government; to fight for their democratic freedom; for the right to be masters of their own future; to oppose foreign encroachment and invasion; and to win the right to live in a truly democratic, free, and independent Ukraine. There has already been countless sacrifices and much bloodshed.

In 1914, the world knew little about Ukraine and cared even less. In 2014, the world knows more about Ukraine, but does it care? Will Shevchenko's prophetic words be fulfilled in this bicentennial year of his birth?

Explore and Experience Our Past