

## The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

### A UNIQUE PUBLICATION ON THE FOLK ART OF HALYCHYNA AND BUKOVYNA *by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator*

Among the many rare and noteworthy publications which we have in our Museum and Library archives is a book entitled *Folk Art of Halychyna and Bukovyna* with an added title in the Russian language *Folk Art of Halychyna and Bukovyna and the All Russian Union During the 1916-1917 War Years*. The book was published in Kyiv in 1919 by the Provincial Committee of the All-Russian Union of the South-western Front which meant Western Ukraine (Halychyna and Bukovyna). This committee was later renamed the Department of Aid to the Victims of War of the South-western regions.



The early military campaigns of the Russian Tsarist army in western Ukraine at the outset of World War I brought about much destruction and human suffering. The first Russian army echelons during their initial occupation of western Ukraine did not act much better than ISIS does today. They ruthlessly destroyed historical monuments, plundered and robbed cultural institutions, killed people at a whim, took hostages and exiled them to Russia. One of the first Ukrainian hostages to be arrested and exiled was Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky. He was kept as a prisoner for three years in north-

ern parts of Russia. But the peasant population really suffered the most. They were uprooted from their villages and became refugees in their own land and then forced to march east by the army.

The Nationally conscious Ukrainians in Kyiv, the intellectuals, the members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, upon learning and witnessing the dire situation of western Ukrainians tried to give aid. They organized as part of the All-Russian Union a separate department which was to give aid to the victims of war. In reality, it was actually a disguised all Ukrainian committee whose purpose was to help western Ukrainians in their plight. Some members of the committee worked in the large cities of Kyiv, Katerynoslav, and Kharkiv to help Ukrainian hostages and refugees. Others traveled to the south-western regions – Halychyna and Bukovyna – and helped the people there.

Once the Committee members arrived in western Ukraine and saw the homeless, poverty stricken, orphaned populace without any means of making a living, they set to work and organized in such regions as Ternopil, Chortkiv, Kolomyia, and Chemivtsi cooperative workshops. There the people were able to work by producing items which they were accustomed to creating prior to the war for their own consumption. These were woven textiles, embroidered items, earthenware ceramics, wood carved items, toys, etc for sale. Thus the people could now make a living. Supplies that were needed came from various sources – Kyiv, Moscow, and local suppliers. Finished products were shipped to Kyiv, Moscow, and other cities in Russia and sold at Bazaars. All this brought urgently needed income for the workers.

The members of the committee were highly educated and professionally trained in various fields of art. There were ethnographers, archeologists, museum workers, artists – all from eastern Ukraine who had never been in Halychyna or Bukovyna. To their surprise, they discovered in western Ukraine a wealth of traditional and authentic folk art unspoiled, uncorrupted by industrial and city influences. They were in awe of all they found in terms of folk art. They began feverishly collecting authentic artifacts, copying ornamental designs, photographing, doing interviews with the locals, children, writing down their

tales, songs, and much more. All of the original folk artifacts which they had collected, namely their notes, notebooks of ornamental designs they sent to Kyiv to museums. There Mykola Biliashivsky (1867-1926) was in charge and was responsible for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Halychyna and Bukovyna. He and members of his committee organized an exhibition of these artifacts in Kyiv and Moscow in 1918 and prepared material for the aforementioned publication. Originally the book was to have included a much more substantial amount of materials, but the political situation in 1918 and 1919 was such that it was a miracle this book was even published! Mykola Biliashivsky was an outstanding scholar, archeologist, and museologist. All his life he had worked in and headed or organized various museum and cultural institutions in Kyiv. He devoted his entire life to the preservation of Ukrainian art and culture. He died a broken man upon seeing how the Soviet authorities in the 1920s began to destroy Ukrainian national heritage, imprison artists, writers, and execute them or send them into exile.

Another notable member of the committee was Evheniia Spaska (1892-1980). She was born in the city of Nizhen – an ancient and important city which was the regiment center during the Hetman State days in the 17th century. She was a student of Danylo Shcherbakivsky (1877-1927) an ethnographer, art scholar, archeologist, museologist. He was a very strict and demanding professor of ethnography, but Evheniia loved his lectures and kept notes of all he taught. As head of the Ukrainian Historical Museum in Kyiv, he had collected artifacts by travelling far and wide throughout Ukraine and had thus enriched the museum's holding by over 30,000 artifacts. But when the Soviet authorities began to persecute him and destroy much of what he had collected, he in protest committed suicide by drowning in the Dnipro River. A few days prior to his death he had spoken to Evheniia Spaska and made her promise not to stop the work that she was doing in her ethnographic research. He told her to persevere and never give up. In 1934 Evheniia was arrested on drummed up charges by the Soviet authorities and exiled to Kazakstan. Although she was rehabilitated in the late 1950s she was not allowed to return to her Nizhen, the city she loved and missed so much. But, stealthily in 1970, during a temporary political thaw, she did manage to go to Kyiv, and one of the first things she did was to visit the grave of her mentor and teacher Danylo Shcherbakivsky. In her corre-

spondence to a few of friends in Kyiv she does mention the fact that she never stopped working and doing research in the ethnographic field even far away from Ukraine. As she stated in one of her letters, she did not idle her time away “I did not bring shame to my motherland”. All of her archival material, her research, her notes were confiscated from her during her arrest and then deposited in the archival center where they are still housed, but to this day have not as yet been published.

This rare and noteworthy book was produced as a result of unique circumstances. It bears witness to events, activities, and accomplishment of a group of devoted and dedicated people to a noble ideal. Without the work of such individuals, much of our cultural heritage would have been lost. How do we stand today in this aspect? It is especially incumbent upon us not only to pay homage to such individuals, but also to support morally and financially those present day individuals and institutions which are continuing the important task of preservation of our cultural heritage for posterity. Without this support, much has already been lost and more may be lost. This time we cannot blame the enemy, but only ourselves.



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