

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

MORE ON UKRAINIAN EMBROIDERY by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The tradition of decorating clothing and household textiles with embroidery was an essential and socially required phenomenon which was practiced by Ukrainians for centuries. In the past, it was an important part



of their traditional way of life and reflected various aspects of their needs – spiritual, ritualistic, utilitarian, and esthetic. In modern times, social and economic transformations brought about changes, and embroidered clothing became a marvel of the past, not abandoned or forgotten, just temporarily put away in a safe place. In time, this safely hidden witness of the past received a new calling, a new mission. Within contemporary Ukrainian society, embroidery became a marker of its national identity. It instilled pride and fostered esteem in Ukrainian heritage, and was used as a symbolic sign of protest against tyranny and inhumanity. In harrowing political circumstances Ukrainian embroidery was used to assert one's steadfastness, to stand up for one's convictions. It was and still is used during triumphant and jubilant celebrations.

For a long time Ukrainian embroidery was not widely known outside of its own milieu. Occasionally, there would be a spark of interest among



scholars and ethnographers, but often-times it was short lived. The recent events in Ukraine, Maidan, the revolution of dignity, mass rallies, special dates designated as embroidery days, all these ignited interest in Ukraine, Ukrainian people, and their culture. Now the whole world looks upon Ukraine and has become fascinated with its cultural heritage. The fashion world now pays special attention to Ukrainian embroidery and begins applying it to the newest fashion trends.

We, as recipients of this rich heritage, should learn as much as we can about it. There are thousands upon thousands of Ukrainian embroidery designs since every region, district, and every



village within the district, had its unique decorative style.

Our Ukrainian Museum and Library has a large collection of embroidered items from various regions of Ukraine. Today I would like to introduce you to embroidery designs from the area of

Eastern Podillia. This area is unique in that it has preserved the most archaic mythological and symbolic motifs, highly stylized, for example, the tree of life, the sun or star motif, goddess protectress, birds, and others. It has also preserved and used one of the oldest embroidery stitches – the *nyz* or *nyzynka* stitch which is an imitation of weaving. In our collection we have women's embroidered shirts

with this *nyz* stitch and one ritual cloth. Many other ritual cloths have embroidered symbolic motifs mentioned above, using a flat stitch



called *kachalochky*. In addition to these, we have a collection of *naframytzi* from that area. *Naframytzi* are small handkerchiefs with embroidery designs in each corner or in rows at the end of two edges. The symbolic motifs on the *naframytzi* were similar to the ones on the ritual cloths. Tradition required that every bride have an ample supply of these handkerchiefs to give as gifts to honored guests at her wedding. The recipients of these handkerchiefs would display them in their homes in a conspicuous area to inform everyone how honored that person is in the community.

If today's society finds Ukrainian embroidery so fascinating, shouldn't we learn more about this embroidery gem of our culture?

the American flag and the bald eagle, she sent it to her daughter here in America. The medallion, although slightly tarnished, is exactly the same as the one from the Yonkers Brotherhood. In its grooves it probably has some particles of Ukrainian soil. This medallion now has a new home in our Ukrainian Museum o Stamford, but questions still persist: How did this medallion get to the Ternopil area? Who was its owner? Why was it buried and probably for many years? If only that medallion could talk, what interesting stories it could tell us.



POST SCRIPT
to the article *Ephemeral Treasures in the May issue of the Sower*.

After reading this article an acquaintance of mine and a resident of Stamford, hastened to tell me of her surprise item for me. While closely looking at the photograph of the membership ribbon of the Brotherhood of St. Michael in Yonkers, and especially upon the medallion suspended from the blue and yellow ribbon, my acquaintance was reminded of something that she actually had in her own home, sent to her by her mother from the Ternopil area. What she had was exactly the same type of medallion as on the ribbon.

It so happened that while digging in her garden recently, her mother had found this medallion buried in the soil. Seeing on it symbols of



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