

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

UKRAINIAN-AMERICANS DURING WORLD WAR I AND ITS AFTERMATH by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



Those nations which were militarily involved in the Great War (World War I, 1914-1918) initiated a centennial commemoration period from 2014 - 2018. Various projects, exhibits, and events are continuously taking place in many European and non-European countries. Through international cooperation, much archival material (made available by 10 national libraries) has been digitized and is accessible on the internet. This digitized material includes books, brochures, maps, photographs, posters, postcards, medals, art, letters, journals and much more.

Ukraine and Ukrainian people participated in this War not as an independent nation, but as split between two great empires -- as part and subjects of tsarist Russia and as part and subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Battles that took place on Ukrainian lands during the War, left the countryside ravaged, cities destroyed, farms and homesteads burned, churches pillaged, population displaced, exiled, incarcerated or massacred. Sad to say, when perusing the above mentioned digitized material, one can hardly find any mention of works and items dealing with the situation and plight of Ukraine and Ukrainian people (which at that time were still called Ruthenia and Ruthenians).

The news of the tragedy and hardships that befell Ukraine during the

War, especially in western Ukraine, reached Ukrainians in America. Many of them still had family and relatives there in desperate need of help. Ukrainian-American newspapers like *Svoboda* and *Ameryka* continuously published detailed news about the War and the situation in Ukraine based on world news, as well as on private correspondence of individuals writing to their families in America. This prompted Ukrainians in America to unite and mobilize all of their efforts, first of all to help their brethren in war-torn Ukraine, and secondly to inform Americans and the entire world about Ukraine, its history, its culture, its centuries-long fight for freedom and independence, about which Americans and the world knew little about and cared even less. The hope of all Ukrainians, those in America and those in Eastern and Western Ukraine, was that once the Russian Empire was vanquished, Ukraine might finally become united and independent.



To achieve this end, Ukrainians in America established civic organizational units for the purpose of informing Americans about Ukraine by publications, by maintaining informational centers, by lobbying the United States government to support Ukraine, and by fundraising for the needy in Ukraine.

In our Museum and Library we have a number of publications which relate the goals, activities, and achievements of Ukrainians in America in their efforts to help war-torn Ukraine. One of the first publications was *Za Shcho Llietsia Krov Milioniv* (*Why is the Blood of Millions Flowing*). This book was published in 1915 by the Philadelphia Orphanage Printing House. It has data about the reasons for the War, description of the first battles, details of destruction committed by the tsarist Russian army, heroic deeds of the Sichovi Striltsi etc. The most important part of this publication is the inclusion of *The Pastoral Letter of Bishop Soter Ortynsky to his Flock in America* which was issued on October 28, 1914. In this letter the Bishop described the war situation in Western Ukraine and urged all

to organize committees and collect funds to help those in need, especially widows and orphans. Collected moneys were sent through the Austrian Ambassador in Washington, DC. Another interesting brochure was entitled *Iak Vyhladaie v Nashim Ridnim Kraiu Teper v Cchas Vijny* (*How are Things in Our Land Now during the War*) published in New York in 1914. This 27 page brochure described the atrocities committed by the Russian army and the arrest of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky by the tsarist Russians. A man by the name of *Hryts Zaiachkivsky* began publishing *Khronika Svitovoi Viiny, 1914-1915* (*Chronicle of World War, 1914-1915*) of which three issues were printed by the Philadelphia Orphanage Printing House. The contents of these brochures dealt mainly with military issues. In 1915, in New York, the Ukrainian National Association published a collection of articles entitled *Ukraine's Claim to Freedom: an Appeal for Justice on Behalf of Thirty-five Millions*. The articles recounted the history of Ukraine, its national revival, movement, and aspirations. A small brochure of unknown authorship, probably published in 1918 under the title *The Problem of Galicia*, recounts the horrors which the people lived under foreign occupations. It maintained that the best solution for this problem was to rebuild the Western Ukrainian Republic. In 1918 the Ukrainian National Alliance (later renamed the Ukrainian National Committee) was founded which united religious and civic organizations. In April of 1918 it published a very informative Review entitled *UKRAINE: a Monthly Review of Ukrainian Affairs and the Problems of Eastern Europe*. This same Committee on July 9, 1919 presented a *Memorial Addressed to His Excellency, The President of the United States, and to the Senators of the United States and the Representatives in Congress*, recounting the atrocities committed in Eastern Galicia and requesting the United States to withhold the ratification of any treaty with the New Polish State which

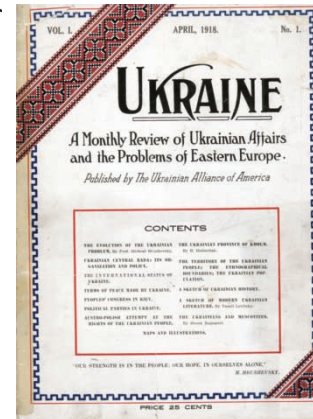
would include Eastern Galicia. This Memorial (of which we have a copy) was signed by Very Rev. Peter Poniatyshyn, chairman, and other civic activists. It is through the work and efforts of this committee that President Wilson declared April 21st, 1917 to be Ukrainian Relief Day. In 1919 in New York City another collection of articles appeared under the title *Ukraine on the Road to Freedom: selection of Articles, Reprints, and Communications Concerning the Ukrainian People in Europe*.

On the 3rd of August 1919, a Ukrainian Convention in the State of Connecticut was held in the Ukrainian Hall in New Britain. This Convention issued a *Memorial and Petition for Liberty*. It was presented to the United States and to the Peace Conference in Paris by the delegates.

This is just a small sampling of publications and material dealing with the Ukrainian situation during World War I and its aftermath which is included in our Library. If anyone reading this article has material dealing with this subject matter, please do not hesitate; send it to us as soon as possible for preservation for posterity.

After World War I was over and peace treaties were signed, Ukraine was again divided and not independent.

Most of the wartime activities of American-Ukrainians diminished and some organizational units even ceased to exist. Ukrainians in America again became an unknown entity. Important evidence and proof of the work, achievements, and sacrifices of those dedicated Ukrainian-Americans which we have in our Library is contained in the publications and archival material that has been and currently is being preserved.



Explore and Experience Our Past