

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Depictions of Traditional Ukrainian Headdresses on Postal Stamps and Samples from Our Collection

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

The renewed Ukrainian Independence in the 1990s brought with it a myriad of positive plans and a need to solve many organizational problems. Among many important tasks to be accomplished was to develop and systematize the communication system *i.e.* - the postal system. From the beginning the designers of the new postal stamps, concentrated on depicting various Ukrainian subjects taken from Ukrainian history, literature, heraldry, architecture, commemorative dates, folklife, Ukrainian fine and folk art. During the years 2006-2008, the Ukrainian postal system issued three series of stamps depicting traditional folk headdresses for which the designers used original examples preserved at various Museums. These three series made a tremendous impact on the public. One of the series even received the prestigious Heorhii Narbut award for best design.

Headdresses are an important part of Ukrainian folk costumes. Their development, establishment, and use were based on practical, functional, customary needs and requirements, aesthetic tastes, and hallowed beliefs in their magical power to safeguard the wearer. The headdress in its utilitarian function offered protection from various hazards and dangers, but in its socially traditional aspects it

was a marker of individual identification within a specific cultural and social structure. A headdress could indicate a person's age, social rank and status, degree of prosperity, occupation, and religious affiliation.

Young girls wore socially prescribed and aesthetically enhancing head decorations depending on their age and their gradual degree of maturity - from girlhood, to maidenhood, to betrothal, to marriage. While these headdresses might differ regionally, their social marker and ritualistic significance remained constant. The most important headdress for a maiden was her wedding wreath. Not only was it the most beautiful wreath she would wear in her lifetime, but it also had to be imbued with all the good luck elements needed at the critical moment of passage from carefree maidenhood to her future life as a matron, creator and protector of family life and hearth. Thus, in addition to the wreath's fancy silk ribbons, colorful flowers, and intricately woven seed beaded bands, a variety of magical herbs and other decorations were used: periwinkle, rue, mint, basil, stalks of wheat, bird's feathers and the like. Each of these elements had some symbolic meaning, such as longevity youthfulness, loyalty, happiness, joy, prosperity. Periwinkle leaves were often gilded.



Matron's bonnets from Poltava region. Ukrainian Postal Stamps (2006-2008).
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.



Bonnet chipets. Poltava region.
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.



Bonnet chipets. Poltava region.
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.



Namitka. Rivno region.
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.



Kerchiefs. Yavoriv region.
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.



Headdresses of Rivno region and Yavoriv region. Ukrainian Postal Stamps (2006-2008).
Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.

For the sake of propriety and modesty, tradition required that married women wear headdresses that would cover and conceal their hair, both at home and in public, and would thus become a marker of her status within the community. To underscore this important and socially essential requirement, a moving ceremony took place at the end of the wedding festivities, with an enactment of the bride bidding farewell to her maiden status and her maiden friends and being officially accepted into the matron's circle. The wedding wreath was ceremonially removed and the matron's bonnet (*chipets*) and a kerchief or a cloth covering (*peremitka*, *rantukh*, *namitka*) was wrapped around the bride's head. The *peremitka* is a long

white cotton cloth with woven or embroidered ornamentation on the two narrow ends. The decorative motifs, the color combination and the wrapping style varied by region, with each having its distinguishing characteristics. Proper and neat wrapping of the cloth, which required time and patience, was of utmost importance since it reflected the wearers pride in appearance and self-respect.

In our museum's collections, we have a good number of headdresses from different regions which we would like to show you. You will be able not only to compare them to the ones depicted on the postal stamps, but you will also see a large variety of artistic ornamentation. ❖