

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Renewed Independence of Ukraine

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator



The concert "Kovcheg" at the Mykhailivskyi Square, Kyiv, Ukraine.



The exhibit "Forever Free Ukraine" featured the 134 color plates depicting the uniforms of the Ukrainian army and fleet during the struggle for Ukrainian independence in the years 1917-1921. The National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Kyiv Ukraine.

We have witnessed a dignified and memorable observance of the 30th anniversary of renewed Ukrainian independence which took place in Ukraine and in Ukrainian communities around the world. Preparations for a distinguished celebration were planned for many months prior to the day.

One of the more ambitious plans was to prepare a special exhibit which would illustrate the various military aspects of the fight for the freedom of Ukraine during the years 1917-1921. Intensive preparations for this exhibit, under the title "Forever Free Ukraine", began many months ago. The organizers of this exhibit were the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, where the exhibit was mounted and displayed, in association with the Bogdan Gubsky Foundation "Ukraine - 21st Century". The curator, Yurii Sawchuk, and the designer, Volodymyr Taran, created an exhibit which ascertained and restored the long forgotten, suppressed and often even purposely destroyed by the Soviet regime, historical facts of the brave and heroic feats of the Ukrainian national struggle for the freedom and independence of Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century.

The ambitious plan of the curator and the organizers of the exhibit required them to gather rare, historically factual and credible artifacts which would illustrate the many-faceted aspects of these events. Particular atten-

tion was placed upon the depiction of military uniforms of the reborn Ukrainian army of the 1917 - 1921 years. For this exhibit, the curators borrowed 250 historically unique artifacts from 20 museums, archival collections and libraries in Ukraine and from 5 Ukrainian museums in the United States, e.g.: Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, Ukrainian National Museum of Chicago, The Ukrainian Museum, New York, Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S., Patriarch Mstyslav Museum, Ukrainian Historical and Educational Center, Somerset. For the first time in 100 years the museums of the Ukrainian diaspora participated in an exhibit of such magnitude by lending valuable artifacts which were not available in Ukraine because they were ruthlessly destroyed by the Soviet regime, yet were miraculously preserved by Ukrainian immigrants in America. Every one of these artifacts not only enriched, but visibly revived past historical memory, and proved the existence of events which for decades were negated by hostile forces.

Visitors to the exhibit in their comments acknowledged that the gem of the exhibit are the 134 color plates depicting the uniforms of the Ukrainian army and fleet during the struggle for Ukrainian independence in the years 1917-1921. Our Museum is especially proud to be a participant in this historic exhibit by lending it our collection of the colored plates.

The author of these paintings was Mykola Bytynsky, 1893-1972 - a soldier in the Ukrainian Army, an artist and a heraldry specialist. He did the drawings of the uniforms in Prague in the 1930s. After World War II, he emigrated to Germany and then to Canada. At the end of the 1960s, he donated the collection of his paintings to our museum.

The organizers of the exhibit invited the representatives of the Diasporan museums whose artifacts were on loan for the official opening of the exhibit which took place on August 20, 2021 on the plaza in front of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War. They were also invited for a number of other festivities connected with the 30th Anniversary of the Independence of Ukraine including a concert at the National Opera, a concert "Kovcheg" at the Mykhailivskyi Square, an official parade on Khreshchatyk, a reception at President Zelenskyi's and others. The opening of the exhibit was attended by hierarchs of the churches, diplomats, ministers, scholars, etc. His Beatitude Sviatoslav in his opening remarks said "Today we are witnessing a unique event... for the first time in 100 years here to the Kyivan hills came unique artifacts preserved in our museums and Ukrainian institutions in different cities in the USA... Behind every artifact there a story of a distinct individual, his fate, his family..." The organizers also prepared for the Diasporan representatives a tour of historic sites like Baturyn, Cherkasy,

Chyhyryn, Subotiv, Kholodnyi Yar, Shevchenko's monument in Kaniv etc.

Our participation in the exhibit, the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Ukrainian independence as well as a journey to historic places left profound memorable impressions. Meetings with museum workers and archivists, their dedicated work filled us with the deep conviction that the young generation of cultural activists is concerned about the fate and future of Ukrainian heritage and is working diligently towards its preservation despite many hinderances and obstacles.

The first three waves of Ukrainian immigrants to America preserved their heritage by establishing a common form of cultural institutions, the museum. Their devotion to the preservation of all that had bearing upon the Ukrainian past and culture was crowned with success. Precious artifacts preserved by them have been united through an exhibit in Kyiv, supplementing and enriching it while also helping to prove the veracity of historic facts.

Let us take an example from our predecessors: preserve and treasure your heritage, support our cultural institutions, museums like our Museum and Library which preserve the historic memory and were its witnesses. Safeguard our heritage for future generations. The responsibility and preservation for our Diasporan Museums and cultural institutions is in your hands. ❖



With Metropolitan Archbishop Borys Gudziak



With Mayor of Kyiv Vitali Klitschko

For more information about The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford, please, visit www.ukrainianmuseumlibrary.org, call 203-324-0499 or 203-323-8866. The Museum is open Wednesday through Friday from 1 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., or by appointment, and is located at: 161 Glenbrook Road, Stamford, CT 06902.