

# The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

## *PASKIVNYK* by Curator Lubow Wolynetz

In the Museum's collection we have a variety of household wooden items from the Hutsul region executed by village coopers and turners, one of which is a Paskivnyk – a Wooden Easter Basket. These wooden baskets were especially prepared and used only once a year for carrying Easter foods to church to be blessed on Easter Sunday.

Depending on the size of the paskivnyk, a number of rectangular wooden staves (mostly pine wood) were placed upright in a circle unto a round wooden foundation and secured (banded) at the bottom and at the top with wooden hoops. Traditionally all wooden parts were fitted in so snugly that nails were never used.

Our paskivnyk was made in the Hutsul region at the end of the 19th century. It has 12 staves and every other staff is

decorated with pokerwork. Pokerwork is the art of decorating wood or leather by burning a design with a heated metal point. A wooden handle was attached to the sides of the basket. The basket had a lid which consisted of a round disk encircled with a wooden hoop. All three hoops, the top of the lid, and every other staff were decorated with pokerwork. Most of the designs on our paskivnyk consist of star motifs, zigzags, rhombi, circles, and dots, which are very traditional.

In the Hutsul region, at dawn on Easter morning, the master and mistress of the house prepared all of the foods which should be taken to church for the blessing. Into the paskivnyk they placed slices of paska, cheese, butter, eggs, pysanky, horseradish root, garlic, sausage, pork fat, and salt. Since most of the Hutsuls lived high up in the mountains, they had to travel to church by horseback. All items which they had to carry were placed in specially woven saddle bags (besahy). When going to church on Easter, they placed the paskivnyk with the foods in one side of the saddle bag and a large paska and other smaller baked breads, which were to be given to the poor and beggars, in another side of the saddle bag.

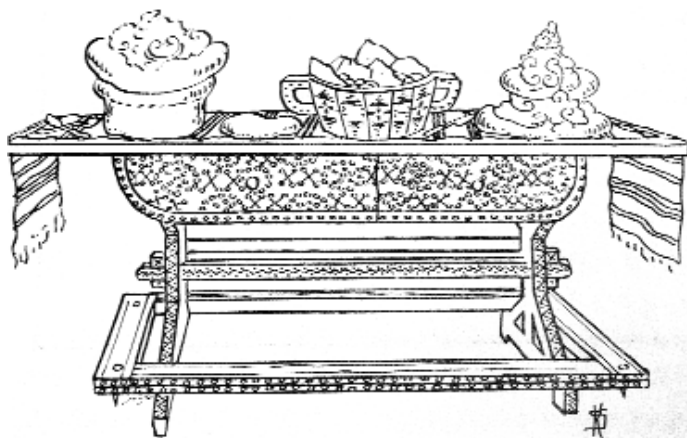
The most-honored Easter bread was the paska, and the preparation and baking of paska was considered one of the most important tasks of the year. Every housewife wanted her paska to be a great success, the best and the biggest. So during its prepara-



tion the housewife had to maintain pure thoughts, think and speak no evil, or the paska might not come out well. The antiquity of the paska as a ritual bread is also evidenced by the decorations which adorned it. The top of the paska was covered with symbolic designs made out of dough, such as a cross, solar signs, rosettes, leaves, pine cones, and sometimes even birds and bees.

There are some special sayings about paska: When the housewife places the paska in the oven she says: "Come out as beautiful as you go in!" A person who does not go to church very often will say: "Every time I come to church, they are blessing paska!"

If the paska is not very good, people say: "Such a paska that thunder and lightning will not crack it!"



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APRIL 24, 2011