

The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

A UKRAINIAN QUILT FROM EMBROIDERY FRAGMENTS

by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

A few years ago, our Museum received a unique gift from a lady from Montreal – a large quilt composed of fragments of embroidery from the sleeves of women's shirts from the Bukovyna region.

The Bukovyna region is situated between Ukraine and Rumania. The Northern part is in Ukraine and is the main part of the Chernivtsi oblast. The

During the years that Bukovyna was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, there developed among the educated and intelligentsia an interest in the folk culture of the various ethnic groups in the Empire. This interest was also

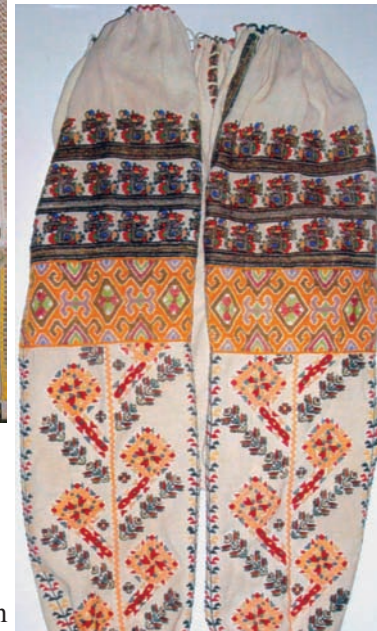
crocheting, and embroidery, it naturally followed that she should have developed a regard for and attentiveness to folk art. Her particular type of expertise made her appreciate the various forms of folk art creativity produced by the peasant populace of Bukovyna. She was especially attracted to the embroidered shirts

narrow branches in one color, usually black or brick, and placed diagonally on the sleeve. These ornaments were symbols of the tree of life. Osypa used parts of the embroidered sleeves and arranged them in a variety of ways to create tablecloths, bed spread-quilts, drapes, handbags, and dresses. Finished items she gave as gifts to her children and grandchildren. The large quilt which our Museum received was her creation and was donated to our Museum by Osypa's granddaughter Stepania Zwonok from Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The individual embroideries are masterfully joined together with fancy drawn threadwork and insertion stitches to make it into a unified whole. A talented and dedicated individual produced this piece by preserving fragments of vintage embroideries and presented them in a new and original way without detracting from their beauty or allowing them to be discarded, but to be retained and bestowed to us to appreciate the wealth of Ukrainian folk art.

How many of us have pieces of embroideries which we do not know what to do with, especially if they are tattered and worn out? I know that many discard them and that is not a good idea. A friend of mine, the artist Sophia Lada, salvaged her mother's finished and unfinished samples of embroideries and out of them created an unusual wall hanging which she displays at various art shows. Another friend, whose mother used to embroider many small serviettes (napkins), used them to make herself a long embroidered skirt which she wore to the once popular Embroidery Dances organized by the Ukrainian Women's League. There are so many ways to be creative and to preserve vintage embroideries. If you are at a complete loss as to what to do with these pieces, then please donate them to our Museum. Here we will have a proper place and a beneficial use for them!



Traditional Bukovynian Shirts from the Museum's collection



southern part is in Rumania. Historically, Bukovyna was a part of the Kyevan-Rus and Halych-Volyn kingdoms; but after the 14th century it underwent many political changes and was a part of different kingdoms and ruled by different occupiers. It became a part of the Moldovian kingdom, then under the Ottoman rule a Turkish province then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. From 1918 to 1940 it was made a part of Rumania. The population of Bukovyna up to World War II was mixed – Ukrainians, Rumanians, Hungarians, Jews, Moldovans, Poles, Germans, and Gypsies. Some inter-cultural influences took place and are apparent; nevertheless, each ethnic group tried to preserve its own heritage and cultural characteristics and in many cases did so until World War II.

In the aftermath of the World War II peace talks, Bukovyna was divided between Ukraine and Rumania. The city of Chernivtsi, for many years the main political, religious, and cultural center of Bukovyna, became the capital of the Ukrainian Bukovyna region – the Chernivtsi oblast.

generously supported by the Austrian royalty. One of the finest publications resulting from this folk art research was published in 1912 in Vienna. It was entitled *Designs of the Home Industry Embroideries in Bukovina*, a copy of which we have in our Library. The author Erich Kolbenheyer spent many years traveling, collecting, and researching Bukovynian folk shirt embroideries, as well as embroidery designs on head cloths and handkerchiefs. This work consists of 75 (20" x 13") color plates. Explanatory information is given in English, French, and German. In addition to the plates, there are charts which give detailed information about each embroidery design, its disposition on the shirt, and the popular name of each motif. All the terms are given in the original Ruthenian (Ukrainian) and Rumanian and translated into English, German, and French. This is a veritable encyclopedia of embroidery designs, motif terminology, and a paramount source of information for scholars. A new version of this work, smaller and of much simpler quality, was republished in 1974 by the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada.

The creator of the donated quilt referred to above was Osypa (nee Maier) Hryhorovych who was born 1850s and who lived in the city of Chernivtsi, Bukovyna region. She grew up and lived in times when interest in traditional folk art was paramount. As a talented artisan, especially in needle arts such as knitting,

worn by the Bukovynian women. Because of the dire economic conditions at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries in the Bukovyna region and elsewhere, village women would come to the city of Chernivtsi and at street markets or during city fairs would sell their creations – earthenware pottery, woven textiles, embroidered items, especially shirts. Osypa Hryhorovych went to such markets and fairs regularly and bought old, worn, tattered shirts, but with the embroidery intact. The sleeves of a Ukrainian folk shirt were always decorated with especially rich and elaborate embroidery designs and Bukovynian shirts in particular. The embroideries on a traditional woman's Bukovynian shirt sleeve were divided into three parts – the sleeve inset, the under inset, and the sleeve proper. Each part had a very specific design. The sleeve inset consisted of narrow, horizontally placed bands filled with polychrome geometric or stylized plant motifs. In some instances metallic threads, seed beads, and sequins were applied. The under inset had a wide horizontal band of large geometric motifs, usually diamond shaped lozenges, or star motifs – symbols of the sun. This part was often embroidered, employing a single bright color. The sleeve proper had a design which was called "the pillar" (stovp). It consisted of a single multi-colored stylized branch of a tree with fancy blooms placed vertically, or a few stylized simple and

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