

EXPLORING OUR MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Pow Camp Journals

By Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

In continuing commemorative reflections on the Ukrainian struggle for independence during the years 1917-1921, it is also necessary to write about wartime internment camps. Ukrainian army corps units, by holding different flank positions at the front, were fighting the onslaught of the enemy from all sides. In the areas where defeat was imminent, soldiers began to retreat to safer areas, and would eventually cross the Ukrainian border. Some would enter Poland; others to Czechoslovakia. Once there, they were disarmed by the individual countries which they had entered and then would be placed into POW camp zones, where they would spend up to three years.

In our Ukrainian Museum and Library archival collection, we have a number of rare publications dealing with internment camps in Czechoslovakia where Ukrainian soldiers had been kept. One of these camps was located in a small town named *Nimetske Yablinne*. The 4,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 400 officers were organized into a brigade under the command of Colonel Antin Varyvoda, 1869-1936. (Most of these soldiers were from Halychyna.) The Czech town administrative power was well-disposed to the interned soldiers. They even supplied them with army rations of food, and officers and sharpshooters also received soldiers' salaries. The boundaries of the camp were quite open, with no barbed wire or sentries on watch towers. The only requirement that the city ordinances insisted on was that army barrack discipline was to be kept in the camp at all times.

The brigade army officers were more than willing to abide by this rule and continued to adhere to it and to enact army discipline and continued army training. The brigade leaders, however, worried about the state of mind of most of the rank and file soldiers, fearing that war



The brigade commemorated the 59th anniversary of Taras Shevchenko's death with concerts from March 1-14, 1920. The concerts ended with a *Tableaux* (a static scene) which depicted Ukraine with a flaming torch in her hand (symbolizing resurrected Ukraine) surrounded by Ukrainian people from all social classes. On the left and the right, Ukrainian soldiers, with a bayonet are attacking the Polish and the Russian enemy respectively. Archives, Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford.

fatigue, despondency, and discouragement in the political outcome would demoralize them to the point of lethargy, laziness, and indifference. Army discipline was fine, but as the author of one of these rare publications stated, what was needed was to "uplift the weak by giving them a new sense of strength, warm up the disappointed hearts with hope, and utilize all of the still reserved energy for systematic creation of fortitude for the future, so that time is not wasted in self-pity and useless deliberations which so painfully and irreversibly rolled into the past."

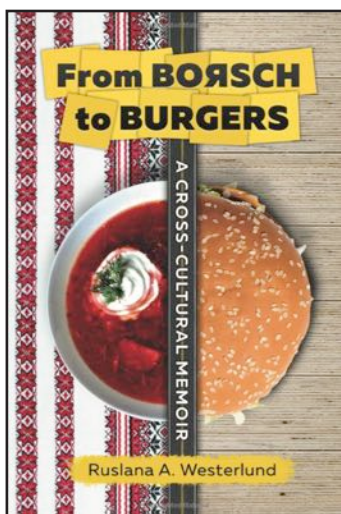
The rare publications about the internment camp which we have are as follows: *Ukraine in Camp (Ukraina v Tabori)* – A Review of the Cultural and

Enlightenment Activities from June 1919 to June 1920 in the Camp of the Ukrainian Brigade (*Nimetske Yablonne*). Compiled by Ya. Yarema (Yakym Yarema, 1884-1964?); and 4 issues of an irregular camp magazine *Holos Tabora (Voice of the Camp)* which was edited by a committee headed by Stepan Ripetsky, 1894-1986 (Even though the review covers activities only up to June 1920, the camp programs continued up to the Autumn of 1921, at which time the camp was disbanded).

The brigade's officers almost immediately organized an *Enlightenment Circle*, whose responsibilities were to organize the cultural activities for the brigade. Since many of the rank and file soldiers were young boys and men from the vil-

lages, and were either illiterate or semi-literate, the *Circle* organized classes for the illiterate. For those with basic and secondary education, courses and lectures in Ukrainian history and literature were organized. There were also practical courses in husbandry, bookkeeping, carpentry, tailoring, etc. Officers donated money to buy books and other materials needed for this work. A library was organized, and even a piano was purchased. In all of these attempts, the Czech town population was very receptive and helpful. A dramatic circle was established, as well as a theatre which staged three plays: Kotliarevsky's *Natalka Poltavka*, Kvitka Osnovianenko's *Svatannia na Honcharivtsi*, and Ivan Franko's *Ukradene Shchastia*, and other humorous skits. A choir, a string orchestra, a brigade band, and a sports team were also established. The choir was invited by the Czechs to perform in the town hall on various occasions. National holidays were celebrated, especially Taras Shevchenko's anniversaries. All of this work was also aided by the fact that families of the officers, and some of the higher ranking soldiers, were permitted to leave their homes in Halychyna and come to this Czech town, where the internment camp was located, live in town, visit the interned, and help out with various cultural activities.

It is almost unbelievable how much and with what energy, enthusiasm, and foresight was done in this brief time for the benefit of all the POWs. Once the camp was disbanded, some of the soldiers remained in Czechoslovakia to continue with their studies. Those who returned home, came back not only with newly acquired knowledge, but also with initiative, energy, and self-confidence. Hence they were able to deal with whatever problems that would come their way, in their effort to rebuild their country after the war, and once more strive to achieve independence. ❖



Book Review by Museum Director

Msgr. John Terlecky

a part of the book's content, there are no recipes in it. It is not a cookbook; rather, it is what the title suggests, a Cross-Cultural Memoir of a young girl who grew up in Soviet Ukraine until the opportunity of emigrating to the United States as an English-speaking linguist occurred in 1995.

Ruslana (nee Deren) Westerlund was born in the year 1973 in the village of Buzhanka in Cherkassy oblast in central Ukraine. Her parents were Evangelical Baptists and her father even became a minister and pastor of the small Baptist community in the village. The book is full of stories from life in Soviet Ukraine and then life in the United States, where she eventually fell in love and married an American citizen. The book is what it claims to be: a memoir of

two different cultures crossing and shaping the author's life. I found the book to be entertaining both with its serious moments and in light stories that chuckle the reader.

The first part of the book attempts to present life in the her village under Soviet rule. She shares her experience of growing up in a society of collective agriculture, of her school days and her membership in the Pioneer youth movement. She describes many holidays that were legally promoted or tolerated by the government. She shares a bit of the family's religious experience and community customs. I enjoyed reading her description of Christmas Eve (quite similar to mine) and how she misses it once she went through Americanization.

The opportunity to emigrate

came when an American missionary group visited her village in 1995. By now, she was a young lady who had a college education with a major in linguistics. She learns English in the British format and longs for American English, the kind that you hear in the movies. One of the American Baptists is enthralled by her and offers to become her sponsor to the United States. Eventually through letters of sponsorship she tastes true freedom for the first time.

Her freedom, nevertheless, requires her to enter a whole new world with so many different ways of thinking and doing things. I understood this well because when I lived in Ukraine during the years 1991-1994, I felt the exact same way, but only in reverse. There was a time that I psychologically was lost in a world

that operated quite differently from the way I was accustomed to.

The rest of the book deals with her life in the United States – of falling in love and starting an American family. She, nevertheless, finds herself explaining how life in Ukraine is different from that in the United States. There are so many comparisons that she writes of. Her background in English linguistics eventually leads her to a doctorate program and a professorship in the United States.

The book is an easy read. I found it to have light humor in her cross-cultural world and to be satisfying in its views. I think that any American who has travelled to Ukraine or a Ukrainian who has immigrated to the West will enjoy it. ❖