

# The Ukrainian Museum and Library of Stamford

## *SAVING AND PRESERVING* by Lubow Wolynetz, Curator

Recently, quite a few articles appeared in the Ukrainian press about the need to save and preserve all kinds of materials dealing with Ukrainian heritage. Most of these articles stressed the sad state of affairs in these matters. The community as a whole, with very few exceptions, has a complete lack of understanding as to the importance of preserving materials of our past which could illuminate our historic memory, safeguard our national identity, and enlighten new generations.

The community is for the most part uninformed, indifferent, negligent, and uninterested. What grandparents and parents had collected and saved, children and grandchildren now throw into the garbage or else sell at a flea market. Organizations and societies cease to exist and their archives end up in the dumpster.

The accomplishments of the first three waves of immigrants to America were and are outstanding, and yet we have only a fraction of materials which illustrate their work, their aims, and the difficulties and obstacles they encountered. So much was lost through neglect. However, there are now within the Ukrainian Diaspora in America a few institutions, libraries, and museums which collect and preserve all sorts of materials, books, archives, cultural artifacts, and ephemera. Therefore, there is no excuse for throwing

things out. Upon inquiry, one of these institutions will accept items in question. The owner or inheritor of a particular item might think it is not important, but it is better to ask before making a drastic move. Other nations and ethnic groups save and preserve as much as possible. They do not



leave the smallest iota to be discarded. We should follow their good example. Now here is an interesting example: It is a story about items which our Museum and Library accepted a few years ago, and thus saved from the garbage heap. In New York City from 1949 there was a Theatre-Studio of Y. Himiak and O. Dobrovolska. In 1966 this became a Ukrainian Stage Ensemble (Studiya Mystetskooho Slova) whose director was Lidia Krushelnytska. She worked with youngsters, teenagers and adults alike, and as a director produced quite a few plays. In 1988, during the Millennium celebration of Christianity in Ukraine, the Ensemble staged Ivan Kocherha's dramatic play Yaroslav Mudryi (Yaroslav the Wise). This was a grand production, quite proper and fitting for such an important celebration. A very important part of the production was the stage decorations which needed to



semble in the Displaced Persons Camp in Regensburg, Germany. In 1950 Vladyslav Klech emigrated to the United States and worked as a stage decorator in many places the most notable of which was the Metropolitan Opera. There he served as head of a group of scenic artists and worked on more than 60 operas, the Theatre of American Ballet, Grand Kabuki in Japan, and the National Theatre of Finland. He was also the art director for the films Cleopatra (1960), Spartacus (1963), South Pacific, and West Side Story.

Vladyslav Klech died in 2001 and Lidia Krushelnytska died in 2009. The Stage Ensemble ceased to exist. Stage decorations from some of the plays which the Ensemble had performed were kept in the National Home in New York. Once the Studio ceased to exist, the storage rooms had to be vacated, and the stage decorations had to be disposed of. I was

asked if our Museum would accept some of the decorations from the Yaroslav Mudryi play, and naturally I said we would. We accepted three icons which on the set of the play were part of the interior of St. Sophia's Cathedral – the church which Prince Yaroslav had built in 1037. Thus, a small part of a very impressive work was saved!

In this way, we managed not only to save interesting artifacts but also to pay homage to an important, impressive, and talented Ukrainian stage set decorator about whose works and accomplishments most of us know very little.

reflect the magnificence of the Kyievan Empire. Lidia Krushelnytska invited Vladyslav Klech to do the stage designs for the play. Vladyslav Klech was born in Kyiv and studied at the Kyiv Art Institute and worked briefly as a stage decorator. During the War he worked in German labor camps from which he was freed at the end of the War. He ended up in Displaced Person's camps for refugees in Germany. He worked as a stage decorator and set designer with Volodymyr Blavatsky, a renowned actor and director of the Lviv Opera Theatre, organizer of the Ukrainian Actors En-

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