

# ACQUAVITAE

ALBERTA'S UKRAINIAN ARTS AND CULTURE MAGAZINE

Winter 2018-19 | Volume 24, Issue 2 | \$5



## *Collections from the Heart*

**THE BILL AND MICHELLE TRACY  
INDIGENOUS ART COLLECTION**

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**MASTERPIECES OF THE HEART:  
EXHIBIT OF OSTRICH  
EGG PYSANKY**



A PUBLICATION OF THE ALBERTA COUNCIL FOR THE UKRAINIAN ARTS

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# ACUAVITAE



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PHOTO BY BORYS TARASENKO

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS:

# The New Royal Alberta Museum



ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED

By Pam Clark

*When the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) opened its doors on October 3, 2018, visitors to the Human History Section were immersed in numerous art, writing and architectural ties to the Ukrainian community.*


ACUA writer and *pysanky* instructor, Lyrisa Sheptak is an active volunteer with the museum, proofing exhibit panels, interactives and working with Exhibit Design. Through her role, she is privy to new up-coming collections and feels honoured to be a valued part of the volunteer team at RAM.

Jack Howell, whose wife Joyce is a board member and instructor with ACUA, is featured in an exciting interactive exhibit celebrating the popular radio program *Call of the Land*. Jack was the host of this popular radio show for thirty-six years beginning in 1970, producing over 7000 programs. This exhibit introduces the history of the program, the technology used, and issues facing agricultural communities across Alberta.

Master carpenter and cantor, Philip Pawluk, is remembered through his incredible impact on the interior design

and carvings in over fifty churches of many faiths across Alberta. His mastery is found in wooden pews, altars, tabernacles and lecterns as well doorway inscriptions.

Elizabeth Holinaty is one of the featured artists in the *Handcraft: Transforming Society* display. Here, her “cherished art of weaving” is showcased in a traditional Folk ensemble adapted from a festive dancer’s costume from the Polissia Region of Ukraine and also includes a *rushnyk*, handwoven with contemporary design. A longtime member of ACUA, Elizabeth shared that her experience with RAM has been humbling and she “is happy to have her Ukrainian handwoven items in the Human History story. The past is honoured in this contemporary setting.”

Next time you visit the Royal Alberta Museum look for the Ukrainian connections in the Human History section and throughout the museum! 



ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED

YAROSLAV KITYSKY  
AND RENA HANCHUK  
SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT

# Lianna Makuch

The Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts is pleased to announce Ms. Lianna Makuch as the recipient of the 2018 Yaroslav Kitysky and Rena Hanchuk award for her promotion and celebration of Ukrainian art.

Lianna is a Ukrainian Canadian theatre artist and graduate of the University of Alberta's Bachelor of Fine Arts Acting Program. Lianna has enjoyed a diverse career as an actor, director, instructor, and artistic producer. She has built an independent theatre company, Pyretic Productions, that has presented an original play every season for the past four years.

Her latest project allowed Lianna to "flex her creative muscle" as a playwright and creator, developing the play "Blood of Our Soil." This work depicts the struggles of Ukrainian people against the atrocities of Stalin and the horrors of Hitler, while drawing disturbing parallels to the current Putin regime. It was for the creation of this project, that Lianna was awarded the Kitysky and Hanchuk Scholarship. AV

## ACUA ANNOUNCES YAROSLAV KITYSKY & RENA HANCHUK SCHOLARSHIP *by Nancy Lyzaniwski*

The Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts is pleased to announce Ms. Dominika Koziak as the recipient of the 2016 Peter and Geraldine Shostak Award for Emerging Visual Artists.

Dominika is a visual artist from Edmonton, Alberta with a Ukrainian-Polish cultural background. Dominika completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at the University of Alberta. After moving to New York City, she attained her Master of Fine Arts degree at the School of Visual Arts. Dominika also received intensive training at the Rome Art Program in Italy where she focused

on painting and drawing from classical architecture and art. In New York City, she attended the Prosopon School of Iconology where she studied classical techniques and style in Icon writing.

Her art focuses on a relationship between contemporary and ancestral culture. Her submission involved the Byzantine Iconographical style of painting, with Korean Pop Idols as the subject. Ancestral techniques from both cultures play a role in the work through the application of techniques of writing an icon with historical motifs. AV



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# WITH BABA'S BLESSING

By Edmonton Eparchial UCWLC

**W**ith *Baba's Blessings – Smachnoho* will be released in January, 2019. The cookbook includes a collection of recipes that are sure to delight Ukrainian Canadian palates. The following recipes have been selected by the Edmonton Eparchial UCWLC, as a preview of what you will find in their recipe book. Recipes have been collected from members from across Alberta.

## *Ukrainian Christmas Eve Supper and Traditions*

Adapted from Sister Christine S.S.M.I

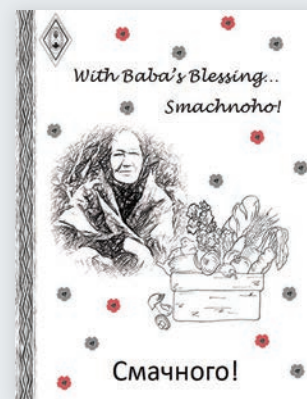
1. The family often sets up a prayer corner. This is usually a small table covered with an embroidered tablecloth. On this table are put:
  - Sheaf of wheat: Wheat is used to make bread. Our Holy Communion begins with bread. The name Bethlehem means "House of Bread". Jesus is the Bread of Life;
  - Icon: To remind us that Jesus as Man, came to save us and lead us to God our Father;
  - Three Branched Candlestick: A reminder of the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit);
  - Bowl of *Kutia*: To remind us of family members who have passed away and have them spiritually present during the supper.
2. The father or head of the family carries in a sheaf of wheat or *didukh*. The word *didukh* means grandfather. This tradition started long ago and
3. The youngest child waits for the first star to appear. Upon seeing the first star, the child happily announces its arrival. A candle on the table, symbolizing the bright star of Bethlehem, is lit.


4. Prayer - *Boh Predvichnyi* (Eternal Life) is sung and the *Kutia* is distributed to the family members.
5. Many items on the Christmas Eve table are symbolic:
  - *Kolach* (braided bread) – symbolizes Christ, the Bread of Life;
  - Candle – symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem;
  - Tablecloth – symbolizes the swaddling cloth Jesus was wrapped in;
  - Straw or hay under the tablecloth – symbolizes hay in the manger;
  - *Kutia* – symbolizes unity.
6. All the food served on Christmas Eve is tied to nature. It is like all that God has created is present for the coming of Jesus:
  - from the field – wheat, rice;
  - from the garden – beets, beans, cabbage;
  - from the orchard – dried fruit;
  - from the forest – mushrooms, nuts;
  - from the water – fish.
7. The twelve meatless dishes served on Christmas Eve are:
  - *Kutia* - mixture of wheat, poppy seeds, and honey (nuts and raisins optional);
  - *Borshch* - meatless beet soup served with vushka (small mushroom-filled dumplings, shaped like ears);
  - *Oselepsi* (pickled herring);
  - *Baked fish* - frequently, a variety of other fish entrées are also served;
  - *Holubtsi* (cabbage rolls) - with rice and onion;
  - *Holubtsi* (cabbage rolls) - with buckwheat;
  - *Varenyky* - potato and onion;
  - *Varenyky* - sauerkraut, or prune/fruit fillings;
  - Mashed white beans;
  - *Pidpenky*/mushrooms - some regions of Ukraine serve mushrooms with beets;
  - *Kapusta* (cabbage) and peas;
  - *Uzvar* - dried fruit compote.

Traditional desserts that are served are:

  - *Makivnyk* (poppyseed roll);
  - *Medivnyk* (honey cake);
  - *Pampushky* (fruit filled, deep fried buns);
  - *Khrustyky* (fried crispy treat, sometimes referred to as ears).

recipes on page 08...



The cover of *With Baba's Blessing... Smachnoho* was designed by Taras Nahnybida with assistance from Zlata Maas. As each section of the Edmonton Eparchial UCWLC cookbook began to unfold, much thought was given to designing a cover that conveyed deep devotion and respect to the important immigrant pioneer ladies. The darkened poppies are symbols of those heroic ladies who, although no longer with us, planted the seeds of our Ukrainian culture on Canadian soil. The brighter red poppies are symbolic of present and future UCWLC members, who preserve our culinary traditions and will continue to do so. 

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...continued from page 09

## Easy Borshch

Submitted in memory of Jaroslava Lotosky, St. Vladimir UCWLC (Edmonton, Alberta)

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups beets, diced
- 1 cup carrots, sliced
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 1 ½ cup cabbage, sliced
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 tsp salt
- 1-½ tsp lemon juice
- 7 cups water or  
3 ½ cups chicken broth &  
3 ½ cups water
- 2 cups tomato juice or  
1 can tomato soup
- 3 tsp oil
- 2 tsp cornstarch
- ½ cup water

### METHOD

1. Add first ten ingredients in order listed. Cook gently for 1 hour.
2. Add cornstarch to water. Stir into hot soup and serve. You may add a small amount of cream or milk, if you desire.



## Stuffed Fish (Baked)

Submitted by Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary UCWLC (Myrnam, Alberta)

### INGREDIENTS

- 5 lb. salmon or whitefish
- 1 medium onion, chopped fine
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- ½ cup celery, diced
- ½ cup of butter (oil on Christmas)
- 2 cups breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- ¼ teaspoon savoury
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper, or to taste

### METHOD

1. Scale and clean fish.
2. Salt lightly inside and out.
3. In skillet sauté onion, mushrooms and celery in oil.
4. Combine with all the remaining ingredients.
5. Stuff the fish.
6. Brush outer surface with oil.
7. Bake on large cookie sheet at 400° F, allowing 10 minutes cooking time for every inch of fish.
8. Baste several times with mixture ½ cup water and ¼ cup oil. Garnish with lemon and parsley. Serve.

## Kapusta and Peas

Submitted by Darlene Atamaniuk St. George's Parish (Edmonton, Alberta)

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup dried whole peas (or split peas, if you so choose)
- 4 cups sauerkraut
- 1 cup water
- 1 large onion, chopped
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 2 cloves garlic, minced (you can use more or less garlic, depending on your taste)
- salt and pepper to taste

### METHOD

1. Soak peas overnight. The next day, rinse, drain and add fresh water.
2. Cover and cook peas until tender. Drain.
3. Rinse sauerkraut in cold water and place in a big pot. Add water and cook for 15 - 20 minutes. Combine sauerkraut with peas. Cook 5 minutes more.
4. Drain sauerkraut and peas, but reserve the liquid.
5. Sauté onions in oil until lightly browned. Sprinkle flour and garlic over onions and stir.
6. Add reserved liquid and stir until mixture thickens.
7. Combine sauce with sauerkraut and peas. Add salt and pepper to taste.
8. Cover and simmer 30 - 40 minutes.





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# MASTERPIECES OF THE HEART

## EXHIBIT OF OSTRICH EGG PYSANKY

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by *Lyrissa Sheptak*

It is said that the *pysanka* is a masterpiece of love. Written in the quietness of the night with the sweet fragrance of beeswax floating through the air, creativity streams, urging the artist toward an almost holy journey. The experience of writing the *pysanka* is as meaningful as its big reveal, so it is little wonder why this art form is one of the most beloved of all Ukrainian traditions.

On April 29, 2018 an Ostrich Egg Pysanky Exhibit was held at St. Josaphat's Ukrainian Catholic Cathedral. Organized by Nadia Cyncar, Evelyn Cook, and Joyce Chronik-Rudiak of The Museum of the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada, Edmonton Eparchy, committee members acquainted guests with the crème de la crème of the pysanky world – the ostrich egg.

Inspiration for the exhibit came from an enlightening conversation between Nadia Cyncar and Marlene Diachyshyn, Waskatenau UCWLC member and ostrich farmer. Nadia instantly became fascinated with the exotic bird and everything it had to offer. Although ostrich farms have been a small part of the Canadian farming landscape for decades, Nadia intended to take this opportunity to introduce it to the broader community.

The tallest bird on the planet, the ostrich has a 16-foot stride, two toes, and can reach up to 40 miles per hour. Its true value is found in its feathers, lean meat, and leather; but to the Ukrainian community the ostrich is prized for its large, strong eggs. Decorating an ostrich *pysanka* takes a great amount of patience, innovation, planning, and experience. For artists and admirers alike, the beauty of the finished product continues to be a source of satisfaction and marvel. There is almost nothing more elegant and stunning than a glossy, intricately designed ostrich *pysanka* that has a story to tell.

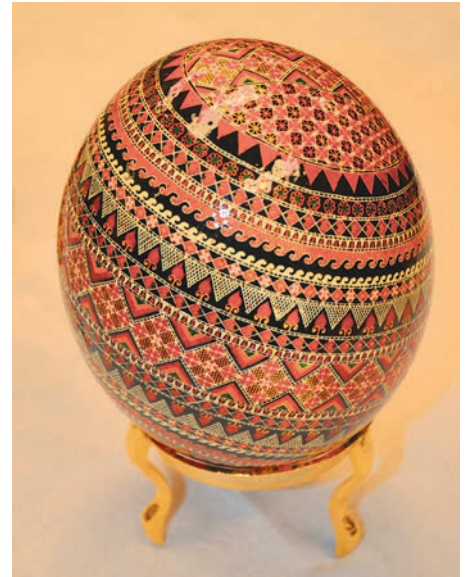
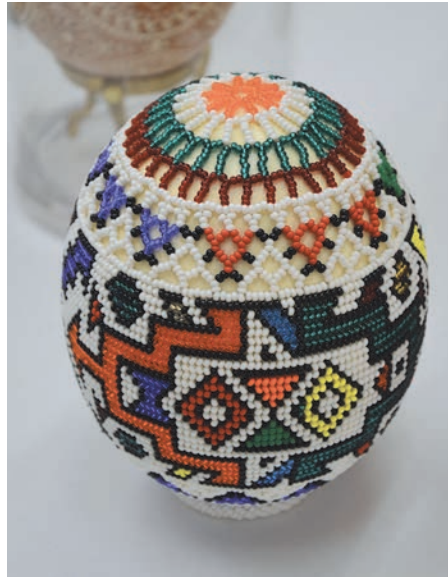
Joyce Chronik-Rudiak kicked-off the afternoon with intriguing facts about ostriches, quickly segueing into the egg itself and the role it has held within different cultures and religions throughout history. Similar to hens' pysanky, in the past, ostrich eggs were

decorated and then hung or displayed in churches and other holy places not just as decorations, but as symbols of Christ's resurrection and new life. With respect to other religions, they stood as symbols of fertility and purity.

The decorating of ostrich eggs dates back thousands of years. Thanks to their tough exteriors that don't disintegrate over time like other bird shells, an archaeological dig site in South Africa was able to unearth multiple layers of broken decorated ostrich egg shells from 60 000 years ago. The symbolic patterns and designs carved into the outer shell of the eggs prove their religious significance in the lives of prehistoric peoples.

Nadia Cyncar offered guests a history lesson of her own and an explanation of the significance of the ostrich egg within the Ukrainian community.





Ukrainians have been writing pysanky, in one form or another, for thousands of years. Pre-Christian Ukrainians searched for meaning of their existence and explained their cycles of life by honouring animals, forces of nature, and worshipping the sun. Eggs became highly prized ritual objects that were believed to have an almost magical quality. But in 988 A.D. with the acceptance of the Christian religion in Ukraine, their ancient ritual practices melded with their new beliefs. Pysanky not only came to express nature's rebirth, but they were likened to Christ's resurrection from the tomb.

During the Easter season pysanky are decorated, blessed, and often shared with others. Today, not only do they hold religious significance, but they are also sold and admired as decorative art pieces. Cyncar relayed that during the last 60 years throughout the diaspora, there has been a renewal of the *pysanka*. Not only is it valued for its ancient beginnings and religious symbolism, but the *pysanka* has become a, "universally recognized popular symbol of the Ukrainians themselves."

In the last couple of decades, farmers

have branched out to include ostriches in their care. In Ukraine, since the early 2000's more than 60 ostrich farms have sprung up, making the special egg a more common feature in households. In Alberta, one such family to become part of this venture was the Diachyshyn family from Waskatenau. The exhibition

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*Not only is it valued for its ancient beginnings and religious symbolism, but the pysanka has become a, "universally recognized popular symbol of the Ukrainians themselves."*

---

committee was honored to have Marlene share the more specific details of running an ostrich farm and business.

The exhibit displayed a wide array of ostrich eggs from 24 various artists and various geographical locations all

decorated in assorted styles. Pysanky hail from as far as South Africa, Brazil, Ukraine, and Jerusalem and showcase different patterns or pictures, and unique styles. But our own Ukrainian community boasted their talent as well. Presented were the works of many local-talented pysanky artists who put their hearts and souls into their own labours of love. These artists worked meticulously on the stories and prayers that they wanted their pysanky to reflect. The work produced by the local artists was beautiful, and our community should be proud to have so many cultural representatives perpetuating the art form.

The exhibit also had the honour of displaying the work of established artists. The pysanky of three generations of Larissa Cheladyn's family were presented, as well as close to 30 ostrich pysanky of artist Sylvia Kuzyk. Audrey Uzwysyn enriched the exhibit with 35 of her ostrich eggs written with traditional pysanky designs. Included in the exhibit were eggs with Trypillian pottery designs that have become popular throughout the Diaspora over the past 60 years. The museum committee also showcased



ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED

examples of unconventional decorative styles, like applique beads and the traditional “*Petrykivka*” wooden egg. Artist Theodora Harasymiw attended the event and shared her own story about a picture she created called “Higher Purpose” which included a mosaic of broken ostrich pysanky pieces. Theodora explained to guests how she had ordered ostrich pysanky, but they were delivered broken and in pieces. Not wanting to waste their beauty, Theodora created a mosaic incorporating the pieces of broken ostrich pysanky.

Following Harasymiw was Evelyn Eveneshen who donated her own personal ostrich *pysanka* to the UCWLC museum. Evelyn explained how while at the 2012 Bishop’s Gala she won an ostrich *pysanka* which was donated by *pysanka* artist Sylvia Kuzyk. Honored and pleased to win, Evelyn divulged that after enjoying the ostrich *pysanka* for some time, she had plans to donate it to the UCWLC Edmonton Eparchial Museum. On this day of the exhibition, Evelyn fulfilled her promise and officially presented it to the safe-keeping of the museum where it could be appreciated and enjoyed by a wider audience.

The Ostrich Egg Exhibition was yet another wonderful reason to gather together to celebrate Ukrainian culture, pay homage to local talent, and support each other in our endeavors to express ourselves and our passions. So it was with many thanks that the museum committee wrapped up their speeches encouraging guests to view and appreciate all 96 ostrich pysanky on display. Like with all pysanky, each ostrich egg was unique. Even if a traditional pattern was written onto an egg, it always conveyed its own individual verve. The exhibition was testimony to the creative capacity of humans and proof that regular people can do extraordinary things.

The ostrich egg, with its particularly strong shell, has proved that pysanky have a staying-power that not many fragile items can claim. Despite the evolution of pysanky designs, techniques, and instruments, when an artist has a moment to sit in silence, heat up their *kistka*, and inhale the beeswax aroma prior to their first steady line of liquid wax on the egg, they never forget the humble history of the cherished egg and art form. The significance, artistic process, and final result is explanation enough as to why the *pysanka* has managed to remain close to the hearts of Ukrainian people for thousands of years. AV

**Thanks to all who keep Ukrainian arts and culture thriving in Alberta**

**Linda Duncan, MP, Edmonton Strathcona**  
 Vice-Chair, Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group

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FEATURE



*The Bill and Michelle Tracy  
Indigenous Art Collection*





PHOTOS BY BORYS TARASENKO

*By Myrna Kostash*

For their honeymoon, Michelle Tracy said she wanted to go to Coppermine, a hamlet on the mainland Arctic coast (now called Kugluktuk, in Nunavut). “We couldn’t even afford a hotel,” but Michelle wanted to “go north.” So north they went. At Hay River, NWT (on the south shore of Great Slave Lake) “as soon as we hit the place, boy, we wanted to have their stuff for sale in the hotel shop. It was our first big encounter with real Indigenous art, including sculpture, beadwork, tapestries, textiles.”

And it was the start of the Bill and Michelle Tracy Indigenous Art Collection, the merger, back in 1975,

of their separate collections. Michelle remembers her first “collectible,” a pair of moccasins made in Norway House with a vamp embroidered with silk thread, given her when she was in grade eight by Uncle Morris Ukraine. He was a hunting guide and cook in a lodge in northern Manitoba and the moccasins were simply a gift. But they triggered an enthusiasm in Michelle that has never gone away. “I really loved those moccasins – hand-made, smelling of red willow smoke, dyed red. Oh, yes, I wore them! I even wore them on a date when I was at university.” Bill’s collection began when, at age eight, on a family trip in Nova Scotia he just had to have a souvenir miniature birch bark canoe and tipi; he still has them.

Michelle had always been interested in Native culture, “in the people who lived

close by us near Pine River, Manitoba (95 km north of Dauphin). I went to a one-room schoolhouse from 1958 to 1966, with kids from a Metis family.” She was raised as a Ukrainian who didn’t speak English until she was five and then given enunciation lessons by her mother “so I wouldn’t have an accent.” Her paternal grandfather built many of the Ukrainian churches, Catholic and Orthodox, in and around Pine River. Bill, by his own admission, is “just a white guy” who traces his American ancestry back to the 17th century. He grew up in Maine, worked at an archaeology site in Illinois, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Cahokia Mounds, the largest pre-Columbian settlement north of Mexico.

I visited the Tracys in their Sherwood Park home. It’s impossible not to go on

an immediate walkabout through the main floor rooms – all walls and shelves bear some eye-catching item. Two Navajo rugs presented as wall-hangings, woven of goat hair and natural dyes, caught my eye; then a sealskin on its frame – retrieved from a dumpster – with an applique image of a shaman who, by his headdress Bill guesses is typical of the Coppermine area (loon skin trims his headdress). Under a pane of glass in a coffee table a number of exquisite Iroquois beaded bags are arranged, dating back to the 1840s, sold in Niagara Falls to tourists of that era. The Tracys purchased the latest of this collection from an antiques dealer in Winnipeg – and you can tell by the design of the beaded flowers something of their origin.

I wandered over to an assembly of ceramic pots perched on top a cabinet, all from the American South West, mainly from communities along the Rio Grande. A large pot by Glen Nipshank from Athabasca who studied in Santa Fe is evidence of the shared Indigenous influences in North America. From the potter Marie Martinez the Tracys commissioned a Navajo pot decorated with mummified horned toads, “a creature addressed as ‘Grandfather’ in

the desert.” They watched as it was fired right in the flames in a plain box stove.

On a wall behind the sofa I peered at a painting executed by the Inuit artist Nauja of Rankin Inlet who depicts a family tucked into a sled pulled by a dog team while caribou and musk oxen safely graze near the coast of Hudson Bay. And below it a small but very elegant print of a sinewy weasel made by an artist in Cape Dorset but sold as a “postcard” at an auction in Winnipeg.

“We think of our collection as a whole even though it is made up of many parts,” Michelle explained. “Each piece will have its own story, so it’s a very personal collection.” And she picked up the very latest piece they had purchased, just a couple of weeks earlier, “an old-style birch bark basket from a store in Prince Albert, the sort of place where local people bring in their stuff, a kind of trading post, really.”

Of their own education as collectors, Michelle says: “You grow up in our communities talking of ‘Indians,’ as though they are all alike. But you start to see their differences as to what is considered beautiful, what their cultural icons are. You start looking at differences in beadwork among cultures. Not everything is geometric!”

By this time I was enchanted. But I wanted to know by what criteria the Tracys make a purchase? There must be some logic or pattern or principle behind their selection. After all, they

both have a practiced eye. Michelle has a MA in Clothing and Textiles from the University of Alberta that included conservation practices. Bill was head of planning at Alberta Historic Sites. They have travelled widely, and repeatedly to the same communities and artists. They have been involved in appraisals. They have curated five exhibits from their own and others’ collections and have contributed to at least four, all locally. For Michelle, each piece must be “significant and unique” in their collection, and they have avoided “kitsch.” “We have focused on collecting modern material, from Indigenous cultures as they are today: 90% of our collection is post-1970,” according to Bill. “We buy directly from the artist – feeding her family with income from her beadwork, say. We couldn’t afford old stuff and we weren’t educated enough to recognize fakes.”

Then they noticed how the “culture of collecting” has changed over the decades. Michelle: “Neither the artists nor the collectors see their work anymore as ‘just’ useful, or ‘women’s work’. Now they make goods of aesthetic value.” Bill gives an example: “In Maine, within ten years of local basket makers’ ‘signing’ their baskets, new work was selling for \$100. As for where does craft end and art begins, what is folk art, what is meant by traditional? We engage all the time in these questions.”

I bring up the thorny issue of “repatriation,” an issue described by The Canadian Encyclopedia as “Most Indigenous ethnology collections found in Canadian museums today were gathered (and sometimes confiscated) by missionaries, government agents, amateur and professional collectors and anthropologists during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Today, many Indigenous nations are requesting that these items be returned to their true home.” Has any group requested that the Tracys do the same? No, because the Tracys’ collection has not been “confiscated” but has been purchased, item by item, often from an artist or craftsperson, otherwise at auction, or at a pawn shop or “wild



PHOTOS BY BORYS TARASENKO



west” souvenir shops. And none of these have “requested” that the purchase be returned. Michelle: “We don’t always have the complete provenance for a piece but we substantiate as much as possible by our own research on the internet.”

From the beginning, they had decided they were collecting ultimately not to sell but to make a donation to an appropriate university museum.” This is Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology at Brown University, Bill’s *alma mater* in Providence, Rhode Island.

In 2018 the Tracys were invited as “guest curators” to work with The Musée Héritage Museum in St Albert in assembling the exhibit, *In Their Footsteps: A Century of Aboriginal Footwear in the Canadian West*. The Museum’s website described the event as highlighting “the diversity, innovation and artistic expression found in the strong traditions of the Dené, Cree, Métis, and Plains peoples of Western Canada,” as selected in part “from the extensive Tracy collection.”

Initially, Michelle was a bit apprehensive about how their part in the exhibit would be received, about “being challenged by Indigenous critics,” but they needn’t have worried. The Museum’s Program Manager, Sharon Morin, said in a conversation with me, that, “as a principle of working with non-Indigenous collectors, I want to know: what is the relationship of the ‘white’ collector to their collection?” Having gotten to know the Tracys, she knows they are not “stealing” but are “building relationships with the artists. They are doing this with their hearts.”

When the exhibit opened last August, Michelle discovered that their collection “was appreciated by visitors from northern Alberta who recognized-so-and-so’s work in a pair of moccasins. This was very moving. Some visitors came two or three times to see the baskets and then the footwear.” Michelle spoke with the Museum interpreters with stories of the individual moccasin makers, enhanced by knowledge of instructor Joyce Beaver



as to place of origin of the artefacts. (Pointed or rounded toe? Tucked vamp to bottom?) Sharon told me that the visitors “were enamoured of how respectfully the moccasins were displayed.”

Before leaving the Tracys’ home, I asked to see some of this footwear. Taken out of the special storage boxes Bill had built for them - the Tracy Collection is catalogued in 46 binders - they were arrayed among other treasures in the dining room table, a kaleidoscope of colour, pattern, and style. Cuffs for leggings for a woman’s dance regalia and the pow wow dress itself, weighted by beadwork on home-tanned deer hire. Mukluks still smelling of smoke and otter fur, made for Michelle by Philomene Umpherville, who makes one pair a year. A pair of beaded sneakers that Michelle ordered from Barb Morin, a high school counselor in Prince Albert. By an unknown maker, silk-wrapped moccasins with horsehair edging, edged in quill work, its pointy style typical of the north until the 1930s.

Michelle and Bill were getting ready for several weeks’ road travel around Mesa, Arizona. As I took my leave, Bill showed me the maps they used for their itineraries, literally Indian Country maps that show all the reservations and the roads, not highways, that connect them. “We’ve been on most of them,” buying from the artists they meet. Their hope for this trip was to meet the extended families of the potters whose work they have collected. “Locals” have become “family” and another way of “collecting.” AV



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# Celebrating Dance

By Lindsay Shapka

## THE THORHILD UKRAINIAN DANCING CLUB'S 45<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

Formed in 1973, the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club celebrated its 45th year of dance with an afternoon concert at the Radway Agricentre on May 6, 2018. This historic group was one of the very first Ukrainian dance clubs in North Eastern Alberta and had only 37 dancers in their first year. This year, the club boasted 52 youth dancers aged four to eighteen, making up four groups, as well as an adult group.

Held on a beautiful sunny day, the celebration concert was attended by almost 300 people, many of whom were alumni of the club who now have children, or relatives who are current dancers. Prior to the performances, a slide show was presented that included photos of performances, rehearsals, and candid moments that had been gathered over the last 45 years and highlighted the club's many accomplishments.

With a buzz of anticipation in the air, the show began with a Pryvit performed by all of the club's dancers. The Pryvit is a traditional way to open a performance and gives a preview of the dances and costumes that will be seen later in the show. Dancers also welcomed guests by presenting the crowd with bread

and salt representing the ancient bond between the Ukrainian people and their connection to both their homeland and new land in Canada.

Backed by the group's stunning, historic painted canvas (see sidebar), the youth groups performed 12 energy-filled dances, and there were also two beautiful performances by the adult group. A surprise to both the crowd and the dancers came when the club's instructors, Jessie Balan and Odessa Bahri, performed two dances with their professional dance troupe Volya.

Jessie is an alumnus of the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club where he began training at the age of eight. When he was 14, he moved to the Yatran Ukrainian Dance Academy in Edmonton and joined the Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble in 2012. Though he travels the world, performing with his professional troupe, he loves returning home to share his passion for Ukrainian dance with young dancers in the same studio that he himself trained in. Odessa's love of dance began at the age of four with both ballet and Ukrainian, expanding into other styles as she got older. She began dancing with Volya Ukrainian Dance Ensemble in

2015, and looks forward to a new season of teaching aspiring dancers in Thorhild.

It was truly an event to remember.

### Dancing With History

The story behind the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club's painted backdrop

The stunning backdrop for the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club's performance — a huge canvas painting measuring approximately 96 inches by 193 inches — was created in 1937 by artist L.D. Snaychuk who was commissioned to paint a backdrop for the stage of the Elevation of the Precious Cross Church Hall near Egremont. The parish's beginnings date all the way back to 1913 when an open-air mass was held at the site, now locally known as Sandhills.

The church hall officially opened on September 1, 1935, and soon became the hub of the community. The completed painting, depicting a scene on both sides of the canvas, hung behind an amateur drama group while they practiced, produced, and held regular performances and also provided a


backdrop for choir performances in the hall. The hall was also home to regular public meetings, fun-filled local dances and concerts, and numerous church dinners and functions.

In 1975, the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club was given permission to remove the backdrop from the hall, and for many years the painting was used at all of the club's dance performances. Unfortunately, however, inadequate care in handling and storing the canvas and its crudely constructed framework, resulted in the deterioration of the work. Attempts were made to reframe the canvas multiple times, but because of its weak and fragile state, this only resulted in additional damage.

Generously, in 1994 the Ukrainian Catholic Parish of Thorhild officially donated the historic artwork to the Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club. The members of the dance club worked meticulously to trace the history of the artwork, and, not wanting such an important piece of local culture to be lost, also took on the responsibility of getting the painting reconditioned and restored.

A restorer was hired, and more than 300 hours went into repairing tears and surface damage, making the canvas flat again, and repainting or filling in any areas where the work had been lost. A new frame and hanging apparatus were attached, and a specialized storage system was created to ensure that the piece would not be damaged again.

The Thorhild Ukrainian Dancing Club continues to use the now vibrant and restored canvas regularly at its concerts, and it is also used by the Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church, by local drama groups, and is put on display for special school and community events.

It is an amazing piece of art and an important piece of history that represents the early Ukrainian pioneers that came to Alberta, their heritage and their culture. 



SYDNEY AND MCKINNA SAWCHUK POSE IN FRONT OF THE HISTORIC PAINTING.

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