



Links

The Newsletter of the OgniwO Polish Museum Society Inc.

Volume 2, Issue 2

Fall/Winter 2006

Stitching Threads Together

“*A Stitch in Time*”, the companion exhibit to “*Threads*”, which focuses on Polish weaving, is now welcoming the public to explore these unique and colourful traditions.

Since the earliest times when man joined together two pieces of fur or animal skin to clothe himself, he used his ingenuity to develop stitches that were both functional and decorative. Through many centuries these stitches evolved into what we loosely term embroidery or in Polish “*haft*”. These stitches were initially functional: to strengthen the construction of a garment by reinforcing seams and areas of highest wear, such as collars, cuffs and shirt fronts. Eventually they became ornamental and characterized differences in class and station, as well as regional, urban and rural environments.

As raw materials and construction techniques improved, so the embellishment and embroidery of the costume became more important. The teaching of embroidery techniques was practised in every home. Young girls would learn from their mothers and grandmothers how to set stitches in the traditional themes and styles of their area. The embellishment of table and bed linens, clothing, tapestries and wall hangings was both necessary and fanciful. Every woman, both rich and poor, had a dowry that included linens and clothing pieces. Often whole extra sheets of cloth or linen were included for possible future use.



Regional characteristics also evolved over time. The display features examples of this distinctiveness with displays of embroidery from the regions of Kraków, Podhale, Kaszuby, Łowicz, and Kurpie. The display is open on Tuesday evenings from 7 – 9 PM and Thursdays from 11 AM – 3 PM, or by appointment - please call to arrange a viewing outside these hours.

Inside this Issue

- 1 Stitching Threads Together
- 2 Thanking Our Sponsors
Preserving Vanishing History
The Making of a Folklorama Cultural Exhibit
- 3 The Making of a Folklorama Cultural Exhibit
(Continued)
- 4 Reflections of an OgniwO Member
Join Our Ranks!

OGNIWO Polish Museum Society Inc.
1417 Main Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2W 3V3
Canada
(204) 586-5070
info@polishmuseum.com

Preserving Vanishing History

From the late 1940s up to the 1960s, Canada experienced one of the largest waves of Polish immigration in its history. These newcomers consisted mainly of former World War II soldiers, their families, and people from Displaced Persons camps. Once these individuals settled down in their new home, they not only established a life here, but they also made significant contributions to Canadian society.

In the 1970s, members of the Polish Gymnastic Association Sokol in Winnipeg began an oral history project that focused on interviewing Polish pioneers to Manitoba. The Ogniw Museum seeks to continue this project and expand it by focusing on this next major wave of Polish immigration to Manitoba, and to present how the life, work, and personal achievements of these individuals enriched modern Canadian society.

Under the coordination of well-known Winnipeg researcher and scholar Magdalena Blackmore, interviews with members of Manitoba's Polish community who emigrated to Canada during this period will be conducted over the next year. One particular area of interest is those newcomers who came to Canada as children or young adults, and who grew up in Canada. Once the project is completed and the research is compiled, there will be a public presentation of these findings. All results of this project will also be available for public viewing at the museum.

If you arrived in Canada as part of this wave of Polish immigrants and are interested in participating in this study, please call the museum at 586-5070 or send an e-mail to info@polishmuseum.com. In order to gather information from as wide a population as possible, we are also interested in interviewing individuals who are not active in Polonia life. If you know of individuals who came to Canada during this time, but are no longer active in the Polish community, we would appreciate if you could provide contact information for these individuals, so that we can invite them to participate in this research as well.

The museum gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Heritage Grants Advisory Council – Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism, which helped make this project a reality.

The Making of a Folklorama Cultural Exhibit – by Dorothy Siemak

Have you walked through a museum display and left wondering who created it and how much time and effort went into it? I know I have, countless times actually.

For many years, the Ogniw Polish Museum has had the pleasure and the great challenge of presenting Polish culture to the visitors of the "Krakow, Poland" Pavilion at Folklorama. From 1997, we have strived to showcase a different aspect of our cultural heritage every year. How else can you possibly do justice to a culture and a history that spans centuries?

As an organization, the museum is blessed with some dedicated and talented individuals. It is a great asset that many Ogniw members have attended workshops put on by the Association of Manitoba Museums. Those workshops expand our collective knowledge of the principles of exhibit display.

Embarking on a new display, we are faced with many dilemmas. Consideration must be given to limited display space, finances, time, and most significantly perhaps, the availability of artefacts. With these limitations in mind, it is often more difficult to choose a display topic than you may imagine.

Many thanks go to the following businesses that generously sponsored the **Threads** and **Stitches** displays:

Cropo Funeral Chapel
Mackow Custom Machinery Service Inc.
Eastern Chrysler Plymouth Inc.
Orle, Davidson, Giesbrecht, and Born Law Offices
Ruban Insurance Brokers Inc.
Karpaty Meats and Deli



The Making of a Folklorama Cultural Exhibit (Continued)

With a topic chosen, we search for background material for the display's text panels, artefacts, and illustrations. Often, we create our own artefacts. For example, the giant szopka for our 2005 display *Szopki Krakowskie*, which evolved as the week of Folklorama went on. For this past year's display *A Day in the Life of Medieval Krakow*, we were fortunate enough to borrow a set of leather scale armour, which gave the display a real focal point – many thanks to Andrew Walichnowski for the loan of this impressive artefact.

As the display text is being written, we consider display layout and how to incorporate artefacts and images. With the text proofed, printed, and illustrations copied or enlarged, the task of putting it all together on panels begins. A few days before Folklorama opens, everything is transported to Sokol Hall and setup begins in earnest. Needless to say, Ogniwo's displays are a time consuming process. Without the effort of many museum members and their spouses and friends, the "museum-quality" display the public sees would be impossible.

Thinking back over the cultural displays I have been involved with, one in particular stands out in my mind. In 2004, the museum stepped out on a limb and presented the display *Strange Medicine: Folk Remedies and Superstitions*. It was a departure from the typical fare of handicrafts, costumes, traditions, and history.



Leather scale armour created by Andrew Walichnowski

Photo Courtesy of Czas/Polish Times

From a personal perspective, I found myself on an odyssey of complete immersion in the topic of folk medicine. I spent countless hours researching, poring through books, and surfing the net. I was so consumed that I even found myself enlisting my father to go with me to the Polish Institute Library in Montreal. He went willingly. Little did we know our excursion was to become a yearly tradition.

I remember being filled with trepidation, worrying how this unique topic would be received by the general public and by fellow Poles in particular. Although we encountered some initial resistance to *Strange Medicine*, it captured the public's interest and accolades in ways I certainly never expected.

With three cultural displays under my belt as principal researcher and writer, you might wonder what drives me. There are days, particularly those leading up to Folklorama, when I honestly think the answer is sheer insanity. In reality, it is a combination of things. It is the joy of learning something new. It is hearing a child's interpretation of what the display is all about. It is the people who tell us the reason they come to the Krakow Pavilion every year is to see the cultural display. It is the satisfaction I feel when I overhear comments like "I grew up in Poland and I never knew that!"

I personally look forward to hearing your comments, criticisms, and ideas at Krakow, Poland 2007. With a little luck, maybe I'll be able to entice you to roll up your sleeves and join us in creating a display on the topic of your choice. Then perhaps, my dream of enjoying a warm spring day sipping café au lait with my father in Montreal without the pressures of exhibits hanging over my head, will become reality.

The museum directors would like to sincerely thank the staff at the **W. Stachiewicz Polish Library** in Montreal for their time, effort, and help in locating research materials, which give such rich detail to our cultural exhibits every year. The Polish Library, affiliated with McGill University, is located at 3479 Peel in Montreal. Check out their website at <http://biblioteka.info/english.htm>

+++++

The museum would also like to mention the "muscle men" and the "curtain experts and handymen" who so generously give up their time to transport the cultural display to and from Sokol Hall every year and help with setup. Thank you Joe Kolodziej, Stan Zoledowski, Waldek Tukaj, and Dennis Tabbernor.

Reflections of an Ogniwo Member

by Dorothy Siemak

When I first moved to Winnipeg over eight years ago, little did I know what life had in store. Especially, since I was only supposed to be working here one year. Moving to a city where you know no one is always a challenge. Luckily, I'm an adventurous sort and was soon exploring the neighbourhoods of Winnipeg, revelling in the newness of it all. In my travels, the sign "Ogniwo Polish Museum Society Inc." frequently caught my eye. Curious, I kept meaning to visit and never really got around to it.

One day, I spotted an advertisement for cooking workshops put on by the Ogniwo Museum. Thinking it might be a good way to meet people, I signed up.

Although I can no longer remember which foods we prepared that day, I do remember feeling a strange sense of having come home. I soon found myself chatting with Ogniwo members and helping them clean up after the workshop. When Mrs. G. Kuzia suggested I join the museum, I didn't think twice. Do I regret it? Hardly.

My parents strived to pass on not only their language and traditions to their children, but also a love for Polish culture. Growing up, I attended Polish Saturday School, sang in a Polish choir, had friends who danced in Polish Folk groups, and was surrounded by an odd collection of Polish books. Is it really any wonder that I got involved in Ogniwo?

My curiosity about the country of my ancestors has remained strong as an adult. Since becoming involved in Ogniwo, I have helped with exhibits, workshops, bingos, open houses, fundraising efforts and have been on the board of directors. Being an Ogniwo member has proven to be an ideal way to explore different aspects of Polish culture while becoming part of a group that I now simply consider family.

Did my parents succeed in passing on their love of their homeland? I would have to say yes. Little did they know that their passion for sharing Polish culture with others would also be embraced by a new generation.

Join Our Ranks!

Interested in learning more about Polish history, culture, and folklore? Would you like to discover more about pioneer life in Manitoba? Are you looking for an opportunity to volunteer a few hours per month while learning new skills? The Ogniwo Polish Museum is looking for you!

Who are we?

Ogniwo is a non-profit organization committed to the promotion of the Polish experience in Canada through Polish history, traditions, folklore, and through the preservation of the history of Poles in Manitoba.

What do we do?

Ogniwo currently carries out its mandate through the preparation and presentation of exhibits and workshops. We are also beginning the process of computerizing our record management system in order to improve its accuracy and efficiency.

Ogniwo collects and preserves artifacts reflecting both rural and urban lifestyles of Poles in Canada as well as researching the history of pioneer life.

What can we do for you?

Joining the Museum can offer a number of exciting opportunities:

- Meet new people
- Discover Polish history, culture, folklore, and the history of Poles in Canada
- Learn how to create exhibits and organize demonstrations
- Practice traditional folk arts and crafts
- Participate in organizing and running special events

These are just a few of the possibilities.

How can you join?

Membership dues are currently \$20 per year. To join or for more information regarding Ogniwo, please call 586-5070 or e-mail info@polishmuseum.com.