Does anybody need a "Tabakiera" ?

by Peter von Pazatka Lipinsky

In 2006, the annual mock battle between the Turkish army under Sultan Kara Mustafa and the Kashubs under the leadership of Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland, commemorating the siege of the City of Vienna in 1683, took place again on the fairgrounds in the village of Brzezno-Szlachecki, Poland. The performance was well attended and many people from the surrounding villages wore their traditional Kashubian costume. At the fairgrounds, there were several vendors who had tables set up to sell their wares, ranging from cotton candy, different foods, books, balloons and beverages.

The book display got my attention and while I was looking at several books, I noted that one of the men standing next to me and dressed in a fancy Kashubian vest took some sort of container out of his pocket. The container looked small and cone shaped and also had some sort of silver ornament on the outside. The fellow proceeded to put something from this container on the back of his hand and sniff it. I remembered now that this must be the nasal snuff that I had read about somewhere a long time ago. This habit dates back to around the XVIth century.

Later that day I met my friend Przemyslaw on the fairgrounds and I asked him about the containers the snuff was being kept in. My friend told me that these containers are specially made out of cow horns. Some are rather plain while other snuff containers are richly decorated with silver and sometimes even with some carvings. These snuff containers are very prominent in the region of Kashubia, because of their reasonable cost and also because of being so unique. A friend of Przemyslaw had one of these snuff containers and I was able to have a closer look. New here was something that would fit into my collection of Kashubian items back home in Cananda. So, over the next little while and before it was time to catch my plane back to Canada, I was able to locate and buy a few of these snuff containers. I needed to find out a lot more about these strange looking snuff containers and I realized that on my next visit to Poland, I must give this item some more attention.

Snuff containers are usually made from one of the following materials: silver, gold, copper, ivory, glass, leather, wood. Now, several years later, the opportunity arose to meet in person one of the master craftsmen, Mr. Rudolf Krecki, who is creating these snuff containers or "Tabakiera" as they are called Polish. Driving about 50 km south-west from the City of Gdansk and just past the City of Kartuzy, one sees on the left hand side of the highway lined with huge linden trees a rather large sign "Wyroby z Rogu." The workshop is located 150 meters off the highway. At the shop, we met Mr. Rudolf Krecki, a very friendly and jovial gentleman who proudly showed us his collection of Tabakieras, which he had made over the years. Rudolf told us that he retired about 15 years earlier, and that is when he took up the hobby of making Tabakieras. A friend from a nearby village showed Rudolf how to get started. To my dismay, I learned that almost all of the Tabakeiras which were on display in showcases in his office were not for sale, but were part of Rudolf's very own collection. But Rudolf always has a few of the Tabkieras for sale and I was able to buy a couple of very nice Tabakieras at a reasonably good price.

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A good craftsman will not reveal all of his trade secrets, but Rudolf told us a few details about how Tabakieras are made. Rudolf visits several abattoirs in nearby towns to select only the very best cow horns he can possibly find. Special attention has to be paid to size and colour of the horns. Most cow horns are black, but some are brown, yellow or multi-coloured, like black and cream. Nicely coloured cow horns are hard to find and Tabakieras made from these cow horns are a little more expensive. Only the tips of the cow horns are used for the Tabakieras. Other portions of the cow horns or smaller horns can be used for other items such as powder horns, jewellery boxes, etc. Your imagination will set the limit of what can be made out of cow horns.

To clean the cow horns, they are boiled in water in a large kettle for four to five hours, sometimes even longer. To shape the cow horns, the horns must be heated over a very hot coal fire. Special tools are used to shape the horns into the desired shape of a Tabakiera. Now that the cow horn has taken shape, the surface has to be sanded first with coarse and later with fine sandpaper. The final touch up job is polishing the Tabakiera, which is done with an electric buffer. The end result is a Tabkiera with a polish as smooth and shiny as a piano.

Not all Tabakieras look the same; they come in different sizes, shapes and colours. The two-coloured Tabakieras are more expensive, because the right colour combination is hard to find. Some Tabakieras are decorated with a miniature design of a silver griffin. Rudolf gets all the silver work done by a qualified gold smith. Prices for one of these Tabakieras can range from a low as $25.00 up to several hundred dollars depending on size, amount of silver decoration and overall craftsmanship. Mr. Rudolf Krecki has customers all over the world. He can be reached at Rudolf Krecki; 83-324 Brodnica Gorna; Poland cell phone +48. 600.428.134.

We extend our sympathy to

The family of one of our ardent supporters, **Patricia Suzanne (Bunczak) Rychter** of Stevens Point, Wisconsin, who passed away on 23 December, 2009 at the age of 57.

And
The family of **Peter John McCamley** of Winona, Minnesota, formerly of Fountain City, Wisconsin, who passed away March 28, 2010 at the age of 77. He left behind his wife Theresa (nee Sopa, the sister of Adeline Sopa) and three children, Maureen (Michael) Norris, Patrick (Theresa) and Mary (Michael) Yazvec.