

# Picture gallery of famous personalities presented in book

By Viktor Korbut

The Radziwiłłs are the most famous aristocratic family from Belarus, with their descendants possessing huge swathes of land from the 16th century up until 1939. Their castles were located in Lithuania, Ukraine, Poland, Italy and Germany. Now, the remaining members of the family reside in Poland. They still visit the homeland of their ancestors regularly and recently made a trip to Minsk — the capital of the country, and Nesvizh — their family capital. Magnificent Nesvizh, with its beautiful architectural monuments, was built by the Radziwiłłs and is now on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Visiting Nesvizh Castle, once owned by their ancestors, Maciej Radziwiłł and Konstanty Mikołaj Radziwiłł II advised the staff of the museum on how best to restore the castle's interiors. The pair also invited the museum's employees to travel to Warsaw to see their family collections.

Duke Maciej Radziwiłł noted his plans to bring unique family artefacts to Belarus soon, which belonged to representatives of the Radziwiłł family who lived in the Nesvizh Castle before WW2. These will form the basis of a new long-term (though not permanent) exhibition at the castle. Much depends on negotiations with Belarus and permission from Polish authorities to remove these cultural treasures from the



Album of Radziwiłł family portraits presented in Minsk among historically reconstructed surroundings

country. According to Maciej Radziwiłł, Belarus is currently demonstrating great interest in the history of his family and he visits our country at least twice a year.

The magnates, who were the uncrowned kings of Belarus for 400 years, are now being officially bestowed with state honours. Recently, the Information Ministry joined the National Library of Belarus and Petrus Brovka Belarusian Encyclopaedia to make a luxurious gift to the Radziwiłłs. The family's album, entitled *Radziwiłłs: 18th-19th Century Album of Portraits*, has been pre-

sented in the National Library.

The launch party for the book was attended by representatives of the Ministries for Information and Culture, alongside those from the National Library of Belarus and the National Nesvizh Historical and Cultural Museum. Representatives from the embassies of Russia, Georgia, Poland and Lithuania also attended, showing that the Radziwiłłs are more than a historical family; they are part of the cultural and public life of contemporary Belarus.

The *Radziwiłłs: 18th-19th Century Album of Portraits* book contains engravings of 165 repre-

sentatives of the Radziwiłł family, with comments added over two centuries ago (written in Latin). These have been translated into English, Belarusian and Russian for the 2,000 copies of the album. Special watercolour paper was ordered from St. Petersburg, manufactured only by the Goznak Factory of the Russian Federation, which imitates ancient paper of Belarusian manufacture; it took six months for the order to arrive.

"The original title of the album was *Icones Familiae Ducalis Radziwiłłianae*," notes Olga Bazhenova, a candidate of art history and an

author of the edition. She knows everything about this book. "It's the largest 18th century family portrait album to be assembled in Eastern Europe, taking over 10 years to create. In 1758, 50 copies were released by the Nesvizh printing house and a second run was made in 1875, in St. Petersburg, using the original 18th century plates. The engraver who created most of the illustrations for the album is Girsh Leibovich. He was born in Mir, which is now famous for Radziwiłł Castle, registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List."

Tatiana Belova, Director of the Petrus Brovka Belarusian Encyclopaedia Publishing House, tells us that the album is a result of efforts by the Radziwiłł family, the Royal Castle in Warsaw, and the National Museums of Kraków and Lithuania. Now, an encyclopaedia of the Radziwiłłs is being assembled, to continue the album.

## The MT's reference:

Maciej — a 14th generation descendant of Radziwiłł Sierotka (the founder of Nesvizh) — is a philosopher on education and a financier. He works as an executive director for a Warsaw railroad construction company. His wife, Anna, is a 15th generation descendant of Mikołaj 'the Black' Radziwiłł. Konstanty Mikołaj Radziwiłł II is a doctor and a former president of the Supreme Medical Council of Poland, who now heads the Standing Committee of European Doctors.

# 'Singer' humble machine symbolises life or associative strokes create portrait of time

National History Museum is good place to exhibit sewing machines

Victor Mikhailov

My mother was a good seamstress; although she didn't work professionally, her talent was recognised locally. I have no idea where she learnt her skills but lots of people came to our house with orders, sometimes travelling dozens of kilometres.

Life in the village was difficult in the remote post-war years, since working in a kolkhoz (a collective agrarian farm) didn't generate revenue. Moreover, after WW2, most people, including my ancestors, had to live in dug-outs, since the fascists burnt down settlements during their retreat. My mother told me that she used to sew at night, by the light of a kerosene lamp. Near dawn, someone would often wake and ask in surprise: 'Irina, haven't you gone to sleep yet?' (several families usually shared a dug-out).

It wasn't difficult for my mother to sew. By reworking clothes (there were almost no new clothes at that time) she brightened peo-

ple's lives; they were able to find some happiness in small joys. The 'Singer' sewing machine was my mother's faithful assistant, serving her throughout those years. I don't know how it appeared in our house but it was treated like a 'sacred cow', always carefully covered when not in use. My mother used a 1930 'Singer' machine to sew my first denim outfit (copying a photo from a magazine). Long after her death, this machine remained in our home, in her memory.

I always wondered how that sewing machine (boasting a famous brand) appeared in a remote village. Even in those times, it was a kind of symbol of life. 'Singer' sewing machines, as well as those of other trademarks, had an air of sophistication. It isn't important how such machines arrived in villages but it is interesting to think how greatly each would have been connected with the personality of its owner and their family.

Each had its own history and



Sewing machines occupy worthy place at museum exhibition

expressive individuality. In fact, Belarus (like other countries) was home to sewing machines from all over the world: from legendary 'Singer', 'Pfaff' and 'Kaiser' to rare and little known trademarks. Today's exhibition at the National

History Museum details the development of home crafts in our villages and towns from over 50 years ago.

This original exhibition has been prepared by the National History Museum, jointly with

the Belarusian Union of Designers, with assistance from private collectors Dmitry Sursky, Pavel Statkevich and Sergey Shilo. Around 40 sewing machines are on show from the National History Museum's own archive and from private collections. Visitors can learn about the major world sewing machine producers from the 19th-20th century while inspecting various tailoring items: dummies, scissors, press irons and textiles from the past. There are also unique, illustrative materials on the history of fashion.

Each time has its own style, with tailors primarily responsible for expressing major trends. They were both designers and stylists and relied on their reputation to find work. Today's exhibition connects the past and the present via an invisible thread. We pay tribute to the technical genius of the humble sewing machine and ponder the skills of our ancestors, for whom 'Singer' was the comfortable supplement to their 'golden hands'.