

Cultural trip to museum, where history is revived

Amateur local historian shows tourists that Mir is famous for more than its magnificent castle

By Lyudmila Minakova

Victor Sakel dreamt from early childhood of a museum where exhibits would be available to touch, rather than being kept only under glass. Years later, he founded his own such museum in Mir.

At the tender age of nine, he built a shelter in his courtyard to exhibit money from the times of Tsarist Russia and newspapers in Polish — found in his grandmother's old trunk. As a senior pupil, he joined Grodno's club of collectors, meeting others who shared his passion, and his desire to create a large scale public museum only grew. He then moved with his family from the Shchuchin District to Mir, where the very air smells of history.

Victor decided to finally realise his dream, buying an early 20th century house for his exhibits, gathered over many years. In fact, a tavern once occupied the building. It was there that Belarusian-Polish writer, publicist and local historian Vladislav Syromoklya heard a unique and sorrowful story and was inspired to write his *Postman* poem — later translated from Polish to Russian. It was given a score and became a famous ballad: *When I Served as a Yamshchik in the Post Office*. The old building required repair but repaid Victor generously; under the floor, at a depth of 1.5m, he found his first treasure — several dozen copper coins. The oldest dates back to 1538 and he has since found a clay pot filled with 17th century copper Solidus coins, in the yard.

Soon, rumours of the unusual hobby of the new resident spread across Mir and people



Peasant's way of life on display at museum exposition

began donating old items from their pantries and attics. Many were suitable for exhibition, with some unique items from Mir Castle even being given. In 1939, the famous castle was barbarically destroyed, with its huge library burnt. Most of the books and other possessions were removed or thrown away but some were hidden by local residents.

"This is how a duke's table found its way into the museum — and this massive 18th century

wardrobe. Perhaps no one had the strength to pull it away, or it was simply too large to push through the door of a villager's hut. It was sawn up and then thrown away. This is Mikhail Svyatopolk-Mirsky's bed — the last titled owner of Mir Castle," Mr. Sakel tells us. He often invites his guests to sit on the bed, as legend says that it has the power to bestow beauty, success and youth on



Victor Sakel familiarises with exhibits

those who take a seat; people may not always believe the story but, according to Victor, no one has ever refused the invitation.

The items on display include chinaware from past days, a mirror in an ornate frame and, even, an ash-tray once used by Duke Mikhail, bearing his personal stamp. All remain safe, thanks to dedicated Victor Sakel. Truly, history lives on in the museum.

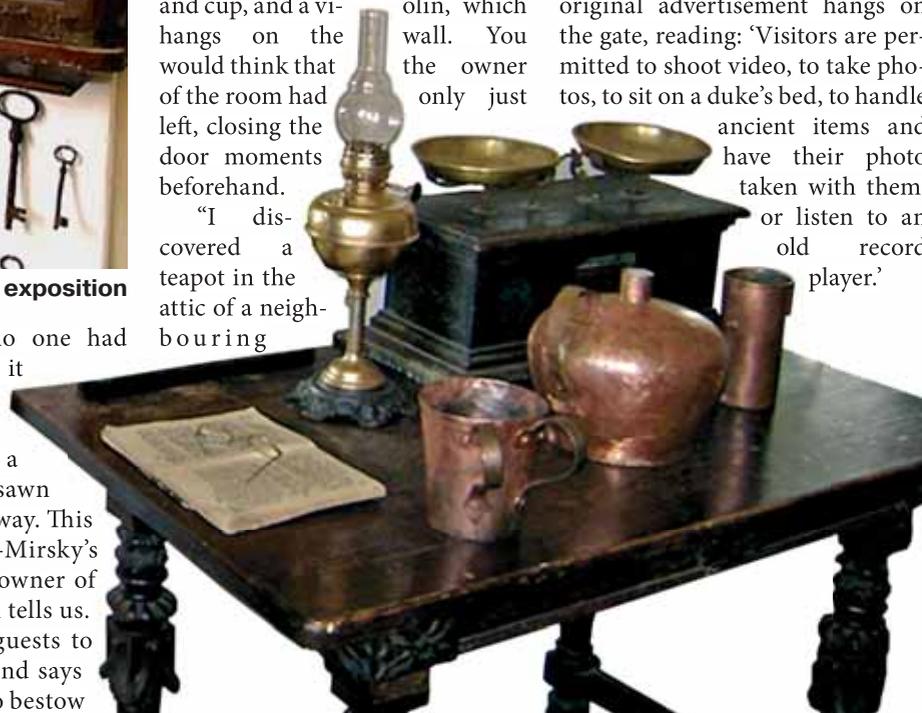
Mir was once home to a significant Jewish population. Until 1939, three synagogues operated there, alongside a yeshiva — a school of higher Talmudic learning. Sadly, most local Jews were shot by the fascists in 1941. Those pain-filled days will forever be part of Mir's history. Accordingly, Victor has created a 'Jewish room' in his museum, exhibiting a sacred Talmud from the 17th century, glasses, a coffee pot and cup, and a violin, which hangs on the wall. You would think that the owner of the room had only just left, closing the door moments beforehand.

"I discovered a teapot in the attic of a neighbouring

house. There were around two dozen Jewish books and a 1938 newspaper file," explains Mr. Sakel. He asserts that his collection dedicated to Jewish culture and, even, his museum are only a small part of the heritage of Mir.

His thousands of exhibits are now on show at Mir Castle, donated by Mr. Sakel to its new display. He emphasises, "Every metre of our town is bursting with history. You can't appreciate the uniqueness of this location unless you visit Holy Trinity Church, with its priceless icons, St. Nicholas' Catholic Church and the streets of the former Jewish district. We should certainly organise a special tourist route through Mir."

The idea is yet to be developed but Victor's museum, located near the legendary castle, welcomes increasing numbers of tourists. An original advertisement hangs on the gate, reading: 'Visitors are permitted to shoot video, to take photos, to sit on a duke's bed, to handle ancient items and have their photo taken with them, or listen to an old record player.'



Mirsky Pasad museum-estate has much interesting to offer

Tales of legendary dynasty

By Tatiana Bizyukova

Edition on noble Radziwill family — Owners of Old Nesvizh — presented in Minsk

The book, released by the Petrus Brovka Belarusian Encyclopaedia publishing company, is written by Andrey Metelsky — a senior research officer at the History Institute's Department of Belarusian Medieval History and Early Modern History, at the National Academy of Sciences.

"The edition describes the history of the famous magnate family of Radziwills and is sure to prove popular among Belarusians and tourists alike," noted Mr. Metelsky at the presentation. It tells vividly

of the major stages in the history of one of Belarus' most beautiful towns — Nesvizh, which was owned by the Radziwill dukes for four centuries. Over that time, twenty representatives of the prominent family ruled the town, each making their own significant contribution to the history and development of Nesvizh and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Rzech Pospolita.

Nesvizh was first mentioned in chronicles in the 13th century and has witnessed many events. The small castle and rural district centre in the early 16th century became transformed under the Radziwills, later becoming one of the largest towns in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Symbolic relic from the time of Peter I to grace the capital

By Andrey Sevostianov

Anchor made three centuries ago delivered from St. Petersburg to Minsk

Recently, Minsk hosted a holiday — *Maritime Brotherhood is Everlasting!* — initiated by the St. Petersburg Submariners' and Naval Veterans' Union, the Typhoon all-Russia public organisation of marines and the Belarusian Union of Military Sailors.

An anchor, created three centuries ago and discovered recently by divers at the bottom of the Gulf of Finland, has been delivered from St.

Petersburg to the Belarusian capital. The relic from the time of Peter I will be used to create a future monument to honour the hundreds of thousands of Belarusians who have faithfully and courageously served in the domestic fleet over the years. It is expected to bear the inscription 'To Sailors of Belarusian Lands from Grateful Russia' and will grace Minsk's Sevastopolsky Park in 2012. At present, the anchor, weighing around a tonne, is installed at 7 Ignatenko Street, on the steps of the well-known DOSAAF Training Centre (in Soviet times, the DOSAAF Marine School operated here) under

a threefold 'Hurrah!' of seamen from various generations: Minsk and guests from Russian maritime towns. The *Maritime Brotherhood is Everlasting!* project aims to train young sailors and ship builders, creating midshipmen, and adapting sailing techniques to suit Belarusian conditions — for the needs of the Union State fleet.

Alongside the 'anchor' ceremony in Minsk, a cultural and historical complex near Zaslavl hosted celebrations dedicated to Marine Corps Day; a military battle was recreated, involving 'black pilot coats' from the time of the Great Patriotic War.