

Depository open to everyone

Unique editions from the Turgenev Library in Paris, the Supraśl Lavra of Poland, and the Nesvizh collection of the Radziwiłł family being stored in the Presidential Library

By Lyudmila Minakova

Foreigners would surely be surprised to learn that most residents of the Republic of Belarus have access to the Presidential Library of Belarus: a rare privilege worldwide. Ordinary citizens can enjoy reading editions normally reserved for the eyes of state bodies, scientists, historians and employees of ministries. Users can draw on a rich fund of specialised literature — on economics and law, as well as valuable early printed and rare editions.

Bibliothèque Russa Tourgueneff

When people go by Government House on Nezavisimosti Square, few guess that the cultural treasury of the country — the Presidential Library of Belarus — is located there, in the right wing. You simply pass a security point, turn a corner and enter the library. You may meet a minister or two but the library is spacious. It's modern and stylish so it's hard to believe that it's actually almost 80 years old, celebrating its anniversary in less than a month.

At first, the Presidential Library was a branch of the State Library and the Bibliographic Institute; later, it was an independent Governmental Library. In the 1930s, it was open daily, without any days off, until almost midnight. There were many editions to work with: the pre-war fund numbered nearly 250,000 volumes — most on the subject of economics,



Unique book rarities on show at the Presidential Library

politics and social studies. Unfortunately, during World War II, the Nazis destroyed all the works in the Library. From 1944, it began to restore its collection gradually and, within eight years, had restored its volume to its pre-war level, including trophy books.

After the war, two echelons of books were brought to Belarus from Germany: all originally taken from libraries in Belarus. As the Hitlerites had plundered many European countries, there were lots of books: from Paris, Amsterdam, Antwerp and so on. Editions from the French Turgenev Library appeared in the Presidential Library (the Governmental Library at that time). It was the first Russian public library, created about 140 years ago by Russian emigrants in Paris,

thanks to Ivan Turgenev. At the beginning of World War II, the Nazis took editions back to Germany; then, books stamped Bibliothèque Russa Tourgueneff began to appear, scattered across the continent. The Presidential Library has about 500 documents from its archive, which have proven useful as an exchange, in reclaiming Belarusian treasures from abroad.

400-year-old rarity

In addition, the Presidential Library of Belarus holds documents from Poland's Supraśl Lavra, and from the libraries of Russian emperors, as well as from the library of the Nesvizh Radziwiłł family. I've held a 200-year-old dictionary, once belonging to Jerzy Radziwiłł; its margins were full of notes. Probably,

someone, not being able to remember compound words, purposefully wrote them out. Books can tell us a lot about their owners. For example, the owner of the Cologne philosophical treatise *De Imperio Virtutis*, the most ancient book in the library, must have been very careful, since its condition is exemplary. It's hard to believe that it's almost 420-years-old!

The department of early printed and rare editions, perhaps, is the most interesting place in the Presidential Library, holding piles of ancient documents and photos, thick encyclopaedias and directories carefully stored behind glass, in special bookcases. Such unique rarities are found nowhere else: a map of Belarus from 1772 and Napoleon Orda's

engraving of Karolin, near Pinsk.

Document — through kilometres

According to Sergey Kvachan, the Director of the Presidential Library of Belarus, digitising editions and the formation of electronic collections is one of the major focuses of the institution today. It's vital to make ancient, rare editions accessible, and protected from time — such as those from the Radziwiłł and Turgenev libraries and valuable official documents which reflect state policy. It's best to make digital copies, for placing online or on discs. Digitisation is part of a state project entitled *National Electronic Library of Belarus*.

Today, the library uses a great many of the latest technologies, including a remote enquiry service and electronic

delivery of documents.

E-books are no rivals to printed word

The Library also presents regular exhibitions: for the public and for deputies. Its current display editions, bearing presentation inscriptions by Maxim Tank, Ivan Shamyakin and other notable figures, who worked in the Library years ago. Writers and researchers can still be met in the Library today.

In its 80 years of operation, the Library has seen much. We now have tablets, iPads and e-books but printed editions remain in demand and the Presidential Library is as busy as ever. Its strength lies in its specialist books, its unique collections and its rare editions, as well as in the respectful attitude of librarians towards every visitor.

Original and creative choice for unusual sculpture

By Andrey Butrimovich

First-ever monument to condensed milk unveiled, representing the town of Rogachev

Just as there's no need to carry coals to Newcastle, there's no need to take condensed milk to Rogachev.

Condensed milk has long been made in the Gomel Region, loved by old and young alike. Accordingly, the new monument is really no surprise: featuring a tin of condensed milk with its distinctive white and dark blue label. However, it is the first such of its kind. Sculpted by Oleg Otchik, it was chosen from several designs to represent Rogachev as being the most 'modern'. A horn of plenty,



The first-ever monument to condensed milk

as seen on the town's coat of arms, was also shortlisted. Made from strengthened glass, Mr. Otchik's creation should last at least one hundred years.

At the opening ceremony, poetry was read in honour of the monument and town, with winning en-

tries chosen from the *Ode to Condensed Milk* competition. Prizes were presented in a festive atmosphere.

It's hoped that the sculpture will draw tourists and promote the town's delicious condensed milk. A 'condensed milk festival' may even be organised.

Whole world loves to visit the residence of Father Frost

By Sergey Smirnov

Tourists from Africa take interest in Belovezhskaya Pushcha

It's no secret that Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian tourists comprise the majority visiting the Belovezhskaya Pushcha over New Year, although others arrive from Poland, Germany, France and, even, Canada. At other times of year, visitors hail from all over the world: even from Africa and Arab countries.

The Residence of the Belarusian Father Frost is the most popular site within the Belovezhskaya Pushcha, having attracted over a million tourists, from 120 countries, throughout the past decade. We can say that it's one of Belarus' major tourist brands.



Even Africans are interested in aurochs

The National Park's ecotourism, with green cycle and walking routes, as well as bus routes, is also proving popular, explains Mikhail Chichko, the Pushcha's chief forest officer. He tells us, "The southern part of the Pushcha — in the Brest Region — is the most developed

for tourists but we're working now in the Grodno Region, to create facilities for visitors. The Belovezhskaya Pushcha is a unique forest, with many tourists arriving to see the reserve and untouched nature. Few such forests exist — in Europe or elsewhere worldwide."