

# City living through centuries

Ancient Novogrudok celebrates 500th anniversary of being granted Magdeburg Right

By Lidia Novikova

The Magdeburg Right regulated the activity of city authorities and courts, trade, property and crafts, as well as taxation and other issues across Europe from the 12th-13th century, enabling cities to self-govern. From the 14th century, those within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania became included in this pan-European economic and civil life. Residents of cities granted the Magdeburg Right were released from feudal duties, and were only legally answerable to their own city officials.

“Novogrudok received the Magdeburg Right in July 1511, during the Brest Sejm, as stipulated in its certificate, which now resides at the National History Museum of Lithuania in Vilnius,” notes Nikolay Gaiba, Director of the House-Museum of Adam Mickiewicz. “The city, which was considered to be one of the most significant in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, had been a voivode centre since 1507. According to its certificate, it established a structure of self-governance, introducing the posts



Novogrudok — known for rich and glorious history — heartily welcomes guests to its holiday

of wojs (self-government leaders in a rural gmina), burgomasters, raitsy (regional administrators) and lavniks (jurors). Residents were released from Grand Ducal power and jurisdiction but had certain duties

to pay: 50 gold coins annually into the city treasury, as well as silver for owning a tavern, shops or being involved in craftwork. Once a week, they had to supply meat to the castle too — if necessary, providing guards

and carts for transporting goods.”

Crafts and trade were the basis of life in the ancient city in the 16th century and, from 1597, trade fairs were organised two times a year in Novogrudok, attended

by merchants from Vilno, Vitebsk, Mogilev and elsewhere. Up to three dozen types of craft activities were represented.

In the second half of the 18th century, when many Belarusian cities lost the

Magdeburg Right, Novogrudok retained this privilege. It was again confirmed in 1776 and operated until 1795, when it was completely abolished in Western Belarus.

The 500th jubilee celebrations in Novogrudok saw a memorial plaque erected to honour the date of receiving the Magdeburg Right, created by famous sculptor Gennady Buralkin; it depicts the coat of arms still used today — a clock and the keys of the city.

The district library hosted its *People and Power* scientific conference, gathering prominent Belarusian scientists and historians, museum staff and local historians, joined by scientists from Poland and Germany.

An exhibition of old photos, entitled *Voivode Novogrudok*, at the History and Local Lore Museum, revived the unique atmosphere of the ancient city. The National Academic Symphony and Pop Orchestra, conducted by Mikhail Finberg, was the honourable guest of the event. The beautiful city, with its rich and glorious history, heartily welcomed everyone for its holiday.

## Argentinean tango with Polesie in mind

Zofia Chomętowska's photos of Pinsk and suburbs return to homeland

By Viktor Korbut

For over fifty years, the photos have been kept by Zofia Chomętowska's family. In 1947, Zofia moved to Argentina, although she was born in Belarus and lived in Poland for a long time. Eventually, in 2008, films made before WWII were brought to Warsaw from Buenos Aires, featuring Polish and Italian cities, in addition to Belarusian Polesie villages along the Pripyat River. Her native village of Parokhonsk is situated halfway between Pinsk and Luninets.

Until November 13th, the photos of Polesie will be on show at the National History Museum, almost all being exhibited for the first time. About 30 of the hundred displayed in Minsk have previously been showcased in Warsaw.

Zofia Chomętowska is a new figure in the history of Belarusian art and belongs equally to Polish culture. Born to the ancient Belarusian family of Drucki-Lubecki dukes, Zo-



Zofia Chomętowska

fia was a member of elite photographic societies in pre-war Poland. Her passion for photography began with portraits of her friends who visited their family estate in Parokhonsk but she also loved to photograph local fairs, merchants, fishermen and hunters. These photos — which are truly close to our soul — are at the heart of the Minsk show. Visitors to the museum can easily imagine Polesie's lost culture and daily life: a combination of the traditions of Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles and Jews.

“Despite Zofia Chomętowska's noble origins, she managed to find a common language with

many people, capturing their images in photographs. She could take shots of women washing clothes in a lake without being stylised; rather, she created precise portraits,” explains the curator of the exhibition, Karolina Puchala-Rojek, of Warsaw's Archaeology of Photography Foundation.

Zofia settled down in Warsaw in the mid-1930s, photographing local architecture — primarily, palace interiors. Before WWII, she was asked by the President of Warsaw, Stefan Starzyński, to create the *Warsaw Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* project. In 1945, she showcased photos of the worn-torn Polish capital and people who were returning to it at the *Warsaw Accuses* exhibition. In 1947, she took the exhibition to London and, later, moved to Argentina with her children — Gabriella and Piotr.

Ms. Chomętowska has now returned to her homeland, via her priceless photos. Nadezhda Savchenko, the Head of the National History Museum's De-



True 'reporting' photos by Zofia Chomętowska

partment for Written and Graphic Sources, admits that Zofia's are true 'reporting' photos. “We're used to seeing Polesie residents looking sad in old photos but Zofia took pictures of smiling people. In addition, many of her photos were taken from high-rise buildings — such as from the towers of the Pinsk Jesuit Collegium's Ro-

man Catholic Church, which no longer stands.”

Not only Minskers will be able to enjoy the photos of pre-war and post-war Warsaw and Polesie, as the exhibition is to travel on to Pinsk in late 2011. Moreover, an album has been released in Polish, English and Belarusian, featuring 200 of Zofia's works.

## School life in 'pre-computer' age

Over six hundred unique artefacts on show at Great Patriotic War History Museum's Lunch Break exhibition

Museum staff have prepared the exhibition of 20th century schools, with help from Minskers, who eagerly shared school relics. Over 600 artefacts have been gathered, the oldest dating to pre-revolutionary times: a syntax reference book (1885), a geography textbook (1892), a Paris-made kerosene lamp (1912) used by the director of the 8-grade school in Yualutsevichi and an early 20th century microscope. Most of the exhibits are from the 1930s-1980s; they belonged to Soviet girls and boys. On growing up, they still revere the spirit and ideals of the past age.

Visitors will surely recognise many of the items, perhaps greeting them as old friends, with happy recollections. Modern schoolchildren will be able to learn about their grandparents' school days, their hobbies and pastimes from an age before computers were ever conceived.