THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS
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**THE MUSEUM OF RUSSIAN ICONS CELEBRATES THE SEASON WITH
TWO HOLIDAY-THEMED EXHIBITIONS**
Nuts about Nutcrackers, **November 14, 2019 - March 8, 2020**
The Lore of Saint Nicholas, **December 6, 2019-March 15, 2020**

CLINTON, MA – Celebrate the holidays with The Museum of Russian Icons by visiting two mini-exhibitions; one tracing the intriguing history of nutcrackers, and the other, exploring the remarkable life and legend of St. Nicholas, Russia's most popular saint and the man behind the legendary figure of Santa Claus. Additionally, the Museum will be offering a Matryoshka Workshop, where visitors can create their own three-piece Christmas tree nesting doll.

Nuts about Nutcracker, November 14, 2019 – March 8, 2020, will be a special mini-exhibition of unique nutcrackers on loan from the Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum in Leavenworth, Washington. This small exhibit will explore the fascinating history of nutcrackers which evolved from simple stones into innovate works of art. The selection of nutcrackers includes traditional Russian pieces, festive wooden soldiers, and a *Nutcracker Suite* set created by Christian Ulbricht of Germany (one of the foremost manufacturers of handcrafted nutcrackers in the world).

Archeological evidence shows that nuts have been a staple of the human diet for millennium, with simple stone tools being crafted to open the shells. Throughout history, few tools have had such variety and style as the nutcracker. By the 15th century, European artisans had transformed the practical tool into functional works of art, most famous are the carved wooden nutcracker dolls.

Traditionally nutcracker dolls looked like toy soldiers and were the inspiration for German author E.T.A. Hoffmann's story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,* which was adapted into a ballet that premiered in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1892 with choreography by Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, set to a score by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Performances and recordings of *The Nutcracker* have since become a treasured part of Western Christmas traditions. In an odd twist many crafters of nutcracker dolls put form over function, and the over-designed tools became purely decorative.

The Leavenworth Nutcracker Museum was founded in 1995 by George and Arlene Wagner, who donated their enormous nutcracker collection and the building in which it is housed. The Museum's collection has continued to grow and now contains over 7000 specimens, probably the world's most extensive collection of nut-opening devices.

The Lore of Saint Nicholas, December 6, 2019 – March 15, 2020, explores the mysterious and wondrous persona of Russia's most popular saint. Saint Nicholas, a 4th century bishop, was known throughout the Christian world as a wonderworker, a gift-giver, and a protector; in the secular world he is more commonly known as children's hero, Santa Claus. The exhibition will feature more than 40 rarely-seen icons of the saint taken from the Museum collection storage.

Historically very little is known about the life of this generous saint; there are no known written works by him, and the earliest document that mentions him dates back to the 6th century. Scholars agree that Nicholas lived during the 3rd and 4th centuries in Lycia, a province in the area now known as Turkey. He became Bishop of Myra, a principal city of Lycia, and is believed to have been an effective and wise leader.

Nicholas's reputation for kindness and generosity grew after his death, and as more people prayed for his help, countless miracles were attributed to him. Tales of the gift-giver and protector of children spread throughout Europe, and the pious, humble saint became a figure of legend. By the 18th century, the Dutch figure Sinterklass (Saint Nicholas) had merged with the English folk figure Father Christmas giving rise to many children's stories and family traditions that bear little resemblance to the icons of the 4th century Bishop.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

On Saturday, December 8, from 1:00-3:30pm, the Museum hosts a **Christmas Tree Nesting Doll Workshop.** Treat yourself for the holidays or create a unique gift for someone. Visitors are invited to join docent and teacher Larissa Dyan for this fun and festive Christmas tree matryoshka (nesting doll) workshop, where attendees will hear the story of the Russian nesting doll and create their own three-piece set featuring a Christmas tree, Santa, and snowman. All materials provided. Cost for the workshop is $30 (Member) or $35 (Non-Members). For adults and children 9+. Class size is limited to 20 participants, with registration required by Tuesday, December 3. Call 978-598-5000 for reservations.

ABOUT THE MUSEUM

The Museum of Russian Icons inspires the appreciation and study of Russian culture by collecting and exhibiting icons and related objects; igniting the interest of national and international audiences; and offering interactive educational programs. The Museum serves as a leading center for research and scholarship through the Center for Icon Studies and other institutional collaborations. It is the only museum in the US dedicated to Russian icons, and it is the largest collection of icons outside of Russia.

Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 11am to 4pm; Saturday and Sunday, 11am to 5pm. First Sunday of the month: free admission! Closed Mondays.

Admission: Adults $10, seniors (59+) $7, Students $5, Children (3-7) $5, Children under 3 Free.
For more information, please visit museumofrussianicons.org. Follow the Museum of Russian Icons on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.