

Law library features Pysanky, an Easter tradition

By Mark Hofmann DAILY COURIER *Sunday, April 12, 2009*

A Uniontown woman's appreciation of creating traditional Pysanky has earned her a spot as the latest artist of the month at the Fayette County Law Library.

Vera Painley first became interested in the art and tradition of Pysanky, or decorated Ukrainian Easter eggs, after seeing a photo of some, which lead her to take a class on creating the eggs at a class at a Greek Catholic Church taught by Bonnie Balas.

"It's based in folklore and superstition and traditions," Painley said. "Every generation puts a little twist to it." Finding it both intriguing and challenging, Painley decided to research and try her hand at Pysanky. Pysanky originated in the Ukraine more than 2,000 years ago, and the Ukrainian people have passed down the folk art consisting of multiple colors and patterns on plain, white eggs. Traditionally done during Lent, the process of decorating a Pysanky can take up to 12 hours as the artist begins by writing designs on an egg with a Kistka, a small metal funnel filled with beeswax and heated over a flame until the wax freely flows from the opening.

Starting with the lightest color of dye, the artist will apply a wax design to the part of the egg they want to remain white and then dip the egg in the dye. Then for the second-lightest dye, the artist applies a wax design to the part of the egg they want to remain the lightest color and then dip the egg again. The process continues until the artist makes the final dip in the darkest dye as the wax on the egg protects the previous lighter shades of dye. The wax is then melted away from the egg, revealing the colorful design underneath the wax, but the process is not yet complete.

Egg yolk and whites have been inside the egg during the process, so the artist must blow out all the liquid from the egg. "It's fragile," Painley said. "It could be destroyed." Painley said she makes sure to protect the completed eggs by applying six coats of varnish to them, which can help to keep the finished eggs indefinitely when stored properly.

She started decorating eggs in 1992 and continued to do so for five years, making more than 250 eggs, some of which she sold. She says she also was commissioned by people to create Psanky for them. "The symbolism of the eggs are great," Painley said. Nearly 60 of the eggs are on display at the courthouse.