



Press Release

INAUGURATION OF CANADA'S FIRST INTERNMENT INTERPRETATIVE CENTRE AT SPIRIT LAKE WITH GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

La Ferme, Quebec: The historic inauguration of Camp Spirit Lake Internment Interpretative Centre, the first such Centre to be established in Canada, took place on November 24 in La Ferme, near Amos, Quebec. Representatives of the Government of Canada took part in the official opening, affirming the significance of the Centre as well as giving recognition to the entire region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Province of Quebec. Their participation also acknowledged the outstanding contribution of the Camp Spirit Lake Corporation, chaired by James Slobodian of Rouyn Noranda, in creating this unique museum.

The Centre tells the story of the Spirit Lake internment site, which was the second largest of the 24 internment camps established across Canada during World War One. Over 1,200 immigrants, mainly Ukrainians, were unjustly interned here as "enemy aliens" between 1915 and 1917, during Canada's first national internment operations of 1914 - 1920. Many were taken from Montreal and surrounding areas, a connection which has made Spirit Lake part of the collective memory of many families in Quebec.

The Centre is housed in the converted former St. Viateur Church in La Ferme. Built in 1940, the church was entirely constructed from the original stone walls that existed at the Spirit Lake internment site. The huge stones were chiseled and transported to build the existing two-foot-thick structure now comprising the museum with its unique symbolic authenticity. The stone walls once stared at, sat on, touched by internees and their guards, are now reclaimed for posterity.

Mr. Slobodian, who steered the entire project for many years, its construction through to its opening, with his dedicated team of volunteers, officially opened the ceremony in three languages, French, English and Ukrainian. Over 100 invited guests were in attendance.

Hon. Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, the evening's first speaker, provided background information concerning the Federal Government's establishment of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund through which partial funding of the Interpretative Centre is being provided. Minister Kenney stated that internment was a blow to the internees' dignity, trust and hope, and a betrayal of our rule of law. He further said that Ottawa's failure to distinguish between loyal Canadians and potential dissidents led to the injustice and tragedy of internment policy. "We now see the great fruits of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund in this Interpretative Centre. Through that \$10M contribution fund, we are seeing the good that is being done here... let us pledge never to forget or to let the memory die."

Member of Parliament, James Bezan (Selkirk-Interlake, Manitoba), acknowledged the work of Prime Minister Steven Harper and Minister Jason Kenney in the recognition of a past wrong that needed to be addressed. Mr. Bezan mentioned that his grandfather arrived in Canada in 1908, and when World War I broke out, his “dido”, along with thousands of other Ukrainians, had to report to the North West Mounted Police on a weekly basis, or face being interned and sent to a work camp in isolated parts of Canada. He added that the World War I internment was “a sad mark in Canadian history, one that was ignored for so long”.

Andriy Hladyshevsky, Q.C., president of the Shevchenko Foundation which administers the Recognition Fund spoke about how the First World War Recognition Fund was established, and the importance of knowing the internment story. He stated that he took great pride in seeing the Interpretative Centre realized with the help of the largest support grant allocated by the Fund, and that the funds designated towards the Interpretative Center were effectively utilized. He commented the project’s realization surpassed all his expectations and will now serve as a barometer for future endeavors.

Representing the Government of Canada were also Members of Parliament Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Alberta), vice-chair of the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship Group; Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke-Lakeshore, Ontario); and Christine Moore (Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Quebec). In a news release, Mr. Goldring stated, “Many countries of the world today conceal or refuse to admit their historical misdeeds to their citizens... Canada not only faces up to its past, but contributed resources, as it has done here, so that past government wrongdoings are memorialized. That way future generations can see, learn and hopefully not repeat such tragedies.”

In a sense of togetherness, prayers were said in memory of the internment victims buried in the Spirit Lake cemetery, by representatives of three religious denominations including Monseigneur Gilles Lemay, Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Amos with Rev. Robert Lalonde, the former priest of the St. Viateur Church; Rev. Theofan Heto of Kirkland Lake, Ontario representing Bishop Stephen Chmilar of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Toronto; Rev. Volodymyr Kouchnir, Dean of the Montreal-Ottawa District of the Orthodox Church of Canada, representing Bishop Andriy of the Eastern Eparchy; and Rev. Dr. Ihor Kutash of St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Montreal, also representing the Ukrainian National Federation of Canada, Taras Pidzamecky, national president. The brief service ended in the singing of the deeply touching “Vichnaya Pamyat” (Eternal Memory).

Among other guests present were: Taras Zalucky, executive director of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) representing Pavlo Grod, national president; Zorianna Hrycenko-Luhova, president of UCC Montreal branch and Quebec Provincial Council who together with filmmaker, Yuriy Luhovy, received a special award of appreciation from Mr. Slobodian for their long-time commitment to exposing the Spirit Lake internment story and their dedicated support in helping to establish the Interpretative Centre; Yourko Kulycky, general manager of Caisse Populaire Desjardins Ukrainienne de Montreal and Roch Ouellet, chairman, Caisse Desjardins Amos; Paul Bourget, general director, and Laurent Corriveau, board

chairman, of Co-Op IGA Amos; Yaroslava Iwasykiw, national president of the Ukrainian Women's Organization (OYK).

Additional guests included Roman Zakaluzny, chair of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association; UCC Ottawa president, Mykola Bilaniuk; and Dr. T. S. Sosiak of Toronto, representing the decedents of those imprisoned during Canada's first national internment operations.

The museum, designed by Nicole Catellier, interweaves historic photos, relics excavated since 1999 from the internment site, artifacts and pictures donated by families of the interned, government documents, interactive displays, documentary films on the internment and more. The explanatory texts are presently in French, the official language of Quebec, with special guidebooks soon to be made available in English and Ukrainian. Guided tours will also be available in either of the three languages.

The event garnered extensive media coverage from various local, provincial, national and international news outlets including CTV national, CTV Sudbury, Radio-Canada, CBC-TV national, Radio Nord Communications Media, Abitibi Express, Le Citoyen Harricana, Timmins Daily Press. The inauguration was also picked up by TV5 television and aired in France giving the opening immediate European coverage. The entire ceremony was filmed by Yuriy Luhovy, with soundman Volodymyr Hayduk. Simon Kouklesky, producer of "Ukrainian time" radio in Montreal prepared special coverage.

The Centre's opening was a testament to the considerable cooperative effort of the entire community of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue area, including the mayor of Amos, the cities of Val d'Or and Rouyn-Noranda with their respective businesses, as well as the Government of Quebec and the Ukrainian and French communities of Montreal and other parts of Quebec. Together, many obstacles and challenges were overcome to reach a common goal. The Centre will serve to inspire future research and educate visitors on the topic of the internment.

The idea of ensuring the historical memory of the beginnings of the Spirit Lake internment site in some concrete form for future generations, germinated back in the early 1970's. However, it was only in the last dozen years and especially the last three, that Slobodian and his co-workers made this vision a reality. The two documentary films *Ukrainians in Quebec 1891-1945* and *Freedom Had a Price* continue to bring to life the story of the internment in Quebec and other parts of Canada.

It was Bill C331 and The Internment of Persons of Ukrainian Origin Recognition Act introduced by Inky Mark, M.P., Dauphin-Swan Lake, Manitoba and passed by the Government of Canada that enabled, in 2008, the establishment of the Ukrainian First World War Internment Recognition Fund within the Shevchenko Foundation, following negotiations with the Ukrainian community represented by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Shevchenko Foundation, and the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association. A major grant designated from this endowment, helped support the establishment of the Centre which was successfully completed in record time and on budget. The Center is awaiting the balance of the approved grant to cover its remaining building costs.

In concluding the inauguration ceremony, Mr. Slobodian thanked all for their valued attendance. In turn, he was given a prolonged ovation in recognition of his significant work in the establishment of the Spirit Lake Internment Interpretative Centre. A reception followed, allowing everyone to view the museum, mingle, and interact.

For additional coverage and information about the opening, the filmed ceremony can be viewed at www.yluhovy.com

To visit or arrange group tours of the Spirit Lake Internment Centre, contact campspiritlake@cableamos.com or tel. 819 727 2267 and Facebook .
Open throughout the year.

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