

e-mova: Ukrainian 30 Online

Cultural Enrichment Part C: Internment 1914-1920

In the late 1890's, Sir Clifford Sifton's government promotion of 'Free Land' for homesteads on the Canadian prairies enticed over 170,000 Ukrainians and other Eastern Europeans to Canada. They all had the same vision – a better life for their children without the hardships of poverty, oppression, and political turmoil brought on by domination of their homeland by other powerful nations.

They certainly could not have imagined the cruelty and hardships which awaited them on the Canadian prairies. For those who came from Bukovyna, in particular, Canada became a new land of oppression and domination – certainly not the 'land of opportunity' which had been promised by the Canadian government.

Did you know that many Ukrainians who emigrated to Canada prior to 1914 were interned as political prisoners during World War I? Did you know that they were considered by the Canadian government to be Austrian, not Ukrainian? Why did this happen?

More than 80,000 Ukrainians were branded "enemy aliens" during Canada's first national internment operations between 1914 and 1920. In addition, almost 5,000 Ukrainians, including men, women and children, were interned as forced labourers in 24 Canadian concentration camps during and after the First World War. More than 8,000 people were interned in total. People were interned not because of anything they had done, but because of what had been written as their country of origin on immigration documents when they arrived in Canada. There was no evidence then, nor has any been found since, of divided loyalties on the part of the victims of these internment measures. The present day value of the economic losses suffered by the internees is in the millions of dollars, but more devastating was the psychological trauma suffered by the Ukrainians who were unjustly accused of being Canada's 'enemies', thrown into internment camps by a cruel twist of fate in their new land of hope.

In spring of 2008, the government of Canada publicly apologized for the error. In a formal statement delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, they recognized that branding thousands of Ukrainians and other Europeans as enemy aliens was wrong. Herding innocent people into concentrations camps, forcing them to labour for the profit of the government, confiscating what little wealth they had in their first few years in Canada, disenfranchising them and subjecting them to other repressive state-sanctioned measures during the country's first national internment operations was unwarranted and unjust.

It's difficult for many people to believe that this actually happened in Canada. For nearly a century, this uncomfortable piece of our history has been left out of all accounts of Canadian history. Until now, stories of racism and discrimination have focused on the experiences of those who represent visible minorities. Since Canadians of Ukrainian heritage aren't considered a visible minority, how could they have experienced discrimination? It has been very difficult to speak about discrimination against language, culture, ethnicity, identity when you do not look like these problems would be part of your world. As one immigrant so aptly described his early Canadian experiences in the school and community, "We were the wrong kind of white."

Bibliography

Luciuk, Lubomyr. **Without Just Cause: Canada's first national internment operations and the Ukrainian Canadians 1914-1920.** Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association, Publisher. 2006

Skrypuch, Marsha Forchuk. **Prisoners in the Promised Land: the Ukrainian internment diary of Anya Soloniuk.** *Dear Canada Series.* Scholastic Canada Ltd. 2007

Internet Resources

Ukrainian Canadian Internment (Wikipedia) – General information

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukrainian_Canadian_internment

Internment of Ukrainians in Canada 1914-1920 - Information from UCC National's website on the agreement reached 08 May 2008 with the Government of Canada.

www.ucc.ca/internment/index.htm

Internment of Ukrainians in Canada 1914-1920 - The purpose of these pages is to inform the general population about the Canadian Government's First National Internment Operations during the period of 1914-1920 which interned Ukrainian Canadians in concentration camps across Canada.

www.infoukes.com/history/internment/

The Internment of Ukrainians in Canada – CBC Archives – an Educational activity. Students will research and take detailed notes about the internment of Ukrainians in Canada during the First World War and about the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War. They will prepare a chart to compare and contrast the events and experiences of the two groups.

http://archives.cbc.ca/for_teachers/402/

Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association - The Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association is a nonpartisan, voluntary, non-profit research and educational organization committed to the articulation and promotion of the Ukrainian Canadian community's interests and to the defence of the civil liberties and human rights of Ukrainians in Canada and elsewhere.

www.uccla.ca/

Ukrainian Immigration (Alberta Online Encyclopedia) – General information

http://www.abheritage.ca/pasttopresent/settlement/ukrainians_immigration.html

Now you may view the PPT presentation **[Internment of Ukrainians in Canada – 1914-1920.](#)** Study the words and repeat the phrases several times so that you are familiar with the terms.