

“Enemy Aliens - Internment in Canada” CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM EXHIBIT

The exhibit “Enemy Aliens - Internment in Canada, 1914-1920” which opened at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa on October 2, 2014 tells the story of Canada’s internment operations and the tragic lives of the internees labelled “enemy aliens”. Very few Canadians have heard of this dark period in Canadian history marked by brutality, racism, concentration camps, forced labour and injustice.

Who were the “enemy aliens”?

When the First World War began in 1914 and the British Empire went to war, widespread suspicion arose in Canada that immigrants from enemy countries such as Austria-Hungary, Germany, Turkey and Bulgaria might be disloyal to their adopted country. Serbs from either Krajina or Bosnia-Herzegovina, regions under Austro-Hungarian occupation at that time, were named “enemy aliens”. The War Measures Act passed by the federal government on August 22, 1914 required that those with “enemy” nationality carry identity papers and allowed the government to monitor and even intern some of these immigrants. Some 8,579 “enemy aliens” were interned across Canada in 24 camps erected nationwide from British Columbia to the Maritimes. These were places of forced labour used to build local infrastructure: roads, rail, even the camps them-



Left to right: Stanko Vuleta, president Ottawa Serbian Heritage Society; Boba Borojevic, host-producer Monday's Encounter, Serbian Radio Program CKCU 93.1FM; Miodrag Sekulic, Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in Ottawa.

selves. By the end of the First World War, 107 detainees had died in the camps due to starvation and miserable living conditions, isolation and despair. Some were killed while attempting to flee the barbed-wire surrounding the internment camps.

The exhibit

The exhibit's 33 photos on 21 panels are grouped under two themes: “Life in the camps” and “The legacy of internment”. The photos were drawn from sources across the country, including: Library and Archives

Canada; provincial archives of Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba; the archives of Mount Allison University, Queen's University and the University of Manitoba; archives of the Cumberland County Museum and Archives; the Glenbow Museum; City of Toronto Archives and others.

The exhibit was officially opened by Mark O'Neill, president and CEO of the Canadian Museum of History. Among the diplomats present was Mr. Miodrag Sekulic, counsellor at the Embassy of the Republic of Serbia. The audience was briefly addressed by Dr. John Maker, historian at the Canadian War Museum; Dr. Lubomyr Luciuk of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation; Ms. Kim Pawliw, an internee descendant; and Father Peter Galadza of St. Paul University.

During the reception Stanko Vuleta, president of the Ottawa Serbian Heritage Foundation and I spoke briefly with Mr. O'Neill and Dr. Maker about Serbs missing from the exhibit list of groups interned in the camps. While Dr. Maker was not aware of the fact that Serbs were also among the internees, Mr. O'Neill acknowledged the mistake and agreed that Serbs should have been identified as one of the ethnic groups unjustly interned.

This exhibit was developed by the Canadian War Museum in partnership with the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation and runs from October 2, 2014 - March 29, 2015. *Boba Borojevic*