

2016 marks a significant jubilee in the lives of Canadian Serbs, not only in Toronto, but across Canada. There is a Serbian flag, across which are inscribed in Cyrillic the following words: "Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Torontu osnovana 17 Jula 1916" (Srpska Narodna Odbrana in Toronto organized July 17, 1916). Exactly 100 years ago. This date marks the beginning of the formation of Serbian organizations in Canada.

In July 1916 Gajo (George) Vasiljevich of Welland, Ontario started the enormous task of organizing the Srpska Narodna Odbrana in Canada.

The first SNO branch was organized in Toronto on July 17, 1916. This meeting of the Serbs was held in the Beograd Restaurant on King Street East (at the south-east corner of Trinity Street). Gajo Vasiljevich, Spiro Hutularevich and Michun Pavicevich came from Welland to attend the meeting. They brought with them the first issue of the first Serbian newspaper in Canada – Kanadski Glasnik. After a number of speeches, Vasiljevich explained why it was necessary to organize the Srpska Narodna Odbrana in Canada. This central organization would gather all the Serbs in one unit and collect aid for the Serbian Relief Fund.

Consequently, the first branch of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana in Canada was formed. Bozidar M. Markovich of Toronto was elected president.

After a meeting in Toronto on March 17, 1916 it was decided to merge the Serbian Red Cross branch which had been in existence since 1914 into the SNO. In December 1916, a new executive which carried out its duties to the end of the war was elected: Milivoj Krstich, president; Aleksandar Pejcich, secretary; Milan T. Milenkovich, treasurer; Nikola Djordjevich, Djordje Jonich, Djuro Gidich and Dragutin Manojlovich, executive members; auditing committee: Aleksandar Stevanovich, Aleksandar Jovanovich, Milutin Djordjevich and Nikola Stojiljkovich.

After the formation of the SNO branch in Toronto, on the initiative of Gajo Vasiljevich, other branches were quickly formed across Canada: Welland, Falls' View, Port Colbourne, Hamilton, Calgary, Regina, Vancouver, Edmonton, Drumheller, AB, Rocks, BC, Fort William, ON, and Tramville, BC.

The SNO had two goals: humanitarian and national. Its first aim was to collect aid

## Srpska Narodna Odbrana 100 YEARS AGO



to be sent to the poverty-stricken Serbian war orphans. The second, in the words of its national executive: "Our SNO and its members wish to manifest our nationality in this, for us, friendly land and at the same time to express our love and loyalty towards Canada."

The organization also had another important role – to shield its members especially those Serbs born on Austro-Hungarian territory from harassment. At the beginning of the war all foreigners residing in Canada had to register and show proof that they came from an Allied country. All of those who were born in countries which now comprised the Central Powers had to renew their registration and get their so-called parole cards signed every 30 days. The SNO was able to obtain a ruling that their members who were born on Austro-Hungarian territory but were Serbs would be exempt from registering every month.

In order to have a national executive and to unite all the branches across Canada into one central unit, a national convention took place at the beginning of August 1916. The first SNO convention in Canada took place in the Serbian hall in Welland, Ontario. Branches from across Canada sent delegates to the meeting. This was the first large gathering of Serbs to take place in Canada.

The convention was opened with a prayer invoked by Rev. Janicije Kukuljevich of Hamilton. Michun Pavicevich was

the convention's chairman and its secretary was Petar Miscevic. The convention was in session a full day and its proceedings were carried out in harmony. At its conclusion, a national executive board was elected: Rev. Janicije Kukuljevich, president; Gajo Vasiljevich, vice-president; Michun Pavicevich, organizer; Bozidar M. Markovich, secretary and Zarko Trumich, treasurer. When Rev. Kukuljevich, on leaving Canada, resigned as president of the SNO, Vasiljevich became president.

The Serbs living in Canada during the First World War contributed greatly, through the SNO, to the liberation of their homeland and the creation of Yugoslavia. The SNO members gave monetary donations for the Serbian Red Cross as well as for the Serbian war orphans. The SNO, also, played a prominent role in recruiting volunteers for the Salonika Front.

Each member of the SNO contributed at least \$1 a month for the Serbian war orphans. The donations were sent through the Serbian Legation in Washington to the homeland.

According to a financial statement published in New York's Srpski Dnevnik on January 12, 1920, it is seen that from the formation of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana in 1916 until January 1, 1920, more than \$8,000 was collected for the Serbian Relief Fund and Serbian orphans. When one considers the low wages (in many cases 25

cents an hour) made by the immigrants the fact that the SNO was successful in raising over \$8,000 is, indeed, praise-worthy.

The first Serbian Day held in Canada was organized by the Srpska Narodna Odbrana on Labour Day, September 5, 1917. Petar Miscevic was the chairman of the Day's organizing committee.

The first Serbian language newspaper in Canada, published in Cyrillic type, was the Kanadski Glasnik – Canadian Herald. The newspaper, a weekly, was published in Welland, Ontario and its first issue is dated July 15, 1916. (So, in effect, 2016 also marks the 100th anniversary of Serbian journalism in Canada.)

One of the initiators and backers of the newspaper was Gajo Vasiljevich. He contacted Michun M. Pavicevich, member of the Montenegrin Parliament, who was in the United States at this time. Pavicevich agreed to come to Welland as editor of the newspaper. At the same time, arrangements were made with Spiro Hutularevich to be publisher and owner of the Canadian Herald.

The newspaper, which served as the organ of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana, had a circulation of 1,750 and was distributed throughout the Niagara Peninsula, Hamilton, Toronto and upper New York state. It ceased publication after two years because of financial difficulties.

The first Srpska Narodna Odbrana (1916 – 1920) ceased its national and patriotic, activities at the end of the First World War but its great accomplishments – recruiting volunteers for the Salonika Front, collecting humanitarian aid, shielding its members from being named 'enemy aliens' – are a great heritage which succeeding generations should not only be proud of but should strive to emulate.

The spiritual successor to the original Srpska Narodna Odbrana organized one hundred years ago is the present-day SNO (Serbian National Shield Society) formed in 1943. Many prominent Canadian Serbs followed in the foot-steps of Rev. Janicije Kukuljevich and Gaja Vasiljevich and served as presidents of the present-day organization: Milutin Bajcetic (Bajcetic would later become head of a newly-formed similarly-named organization), Pero Bulat, Bozidar M. Markovich, Mihailo Obradovich, Velimir Toskovich, Bora Dragasevich and Aca Pantelich.

*Olga B. Markovich*

### A prolific, productive, patriotic centennial

## SERBIAN NATIONAL SHIELD SOCIETY OF CANADA SRPSKA NARODNA ODBRANA U KANADI (SNO)



When World War I started the small number of Serbs in Canada were in a dichotomous position - those who had arrived from western regions with Austro-Hungarian passports were considered enemy aliens and some were interned in 1914 in labour camps in Canada's hinterlands, while those from Serbia proper were considered allies. In fact, all Serbs supported Canada and the Allied cause.

Those early Serbian immigrants, separated from their homeland and with little means of communication, felt the need to convene in order to promote and preserve our Serbian heritage and to do good works to the benefit of the community here and

overseas. In other words, their goals were twofold: patriotic and humanitarian.

Inspired by the initiative of Serbian American scientist and honorary consul of the Kingdom of Serbia in New York, Mihajlo Pupin, who established the Srpska narodna odbrana u Americi, a small group of Toronto Serbs formed the first chapter of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi - SNO (Serbian National Shield Society of Canada) on July 17, 1916 at a meeting held at the first Serbian restaurant in Toronto - Beograd Restaurant on King Street East. Details of that beginning are recorded by Olga B. Markovich in this issue.

#### World War I period

In other words, the SNO was formed in the middle of World War I when Serbia was occupied by the enemy and many Serbian

refugees had endured an unprecedented human Golgotha withdrawing through the Albanian mountains. Serbian volunteers from this continent wanted to contribute to the Allied cause and trained for the Salonika Front in the military camps in Quebec. The SNO had a role in recruiting them. The SNO also collected financial aid for Serbian orphans through the Serbian Red Cross.

Less than three years after its inception the SNO, represented by Bozidar M. Markovich, facilitated the release of unjustly interned Serbs in 1919, and 89 years later the story continued when the SNO was represented on the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund to contribute to uncovering details of that tragic episode. Now SNO member, Dr. Marin Mandreš, is doing academic research on this topic. In 2014 the SNO coor-

dated the placement of memorial plaques at the St. George Church in Niagara Falls and the Serbian Heritage Museum in Windsor in a nationwide project marking the centennial of the internment.

By the end of the Great War many chapters of the SNO were organized right across Canada, but some members also returned to the homeland. After the assassination of King Aleksandar I in Marseilles, the SNO supported the preservation of the unified state of Yugoslavia.

#### World War II and beyond

Although its activities diminished in the interwar years, the SNO was renewed at an All Serbian National Assembly in Hamilton in 1943 and gave its support to the pro-Allied movement of Draža Mihailović. Continuing one of its original