

## SERBIAN HERITAGE MUSEUM OF WINDSOR

“PROJECT CTO” MEMORIAL PLAQUE AND MUSEUM EXHIBIT:  
REMEMBERING THE INTERNMENT

As guests started gathering at the Serbian Cultural Centre in Windsor at 10 a.m. on August 22, 2014, the local CBC TV station van was approaching the building to record the unveiling of the memorial plaque commemorating the centennial of the implementation of the War Measures Act which had set the stage for Canada's First National Internment Operations and the resulting internment of thousands of immigrants during the First World War. Reparation for this tragic event in the form of a nationwide remembrance called “Project CTO” - the unveiling of 100 memorial plaques - was long overdue, the result of decades of research, mainly by Ukrainian Canadian historians. Project CTO (Project 100) is the initiative of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation and funded by the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWWIRF). The Serbian Heritage Museum was proud to participate in this important project and to offer its renovated premises as the home of the memorial plaque and exhibit exploring the relatively unknown theme of internment in Canadian history.



Main speaker: Draga Dragasevic

In 1987 research by Ukrainian Canadian scholars uncovered a great injustice perpetrated by the Canadian government against Ukrainians and many other ethnic communities, all former citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who had immigrated to Canada. During the First World War they were labelled “enemy aliens” and many were systematically confined in internment camps all over the country. Twenty-one years later in 2008, the Canadian government reached an agreement with the Ukrainian community and created the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund to support educational and commemorative initiatives dedicated to the internment. The representative of the Serbian community and Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi (Serbian National Shield Society of Canada) on the Endowment Council of the CFWWIRF was Draga Dragasevic.

The commemorative program opened with introductory remarks by MC Jim Crichton, CTV Windsor news anchor, and welcoming remarks by Anne Dube, Museum Board Secretary and Chairperson of the Museum internment exhibit committee who also read letters of greeting from the Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia, His Excellency Ambassador Mihailo Papazoglu, and Olga B. Markovich, daughter of Bozidar Markovich who had acted on behalf of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana u Kanadi to liberate Serbs from the Kapuskasing camp in 1919. At precisely 11



Museum Committee:

Draga Chuk, Anna Dube, Milos Savic, Julka Vlajic, Dr. Brian Owens, Cathy Diklich.

a.m. the Serbian community of Windsor joined the Niagara Falls Serbian community and other communities in a solemn remembrance of August 22, 1914 when the War Measures Act was implemented authorizing the internment of thousands of innocent civilians during the period 1914 to 1920. Three prominent and respected Serbian community leaders had the honour of unveiling the memorial plaque: Bora Dragasevic and Milorad Gacesa, both honorary presidents of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana; and Blazo Brkovic, vice president and local Odbrana representative. Attending dignitaries were: Windsor Mayor Eddie Francis who praised the many accomplishments and contributions of the Serbian community in the city, MP Joe Comartin who expressed regret that such dark moments had occurred in Canadian history; MPP Percy Hatfield also addressed the guests; and Peter Dobric, Gracanica Church president, applauded the Museum's commemoration of this occasion.

The historical segments of the program followed. Dr. Brian Owens, University Archivist of the Leddy Library at the University of Windsor who had collaborated with the exhibit committee in organizing the documentation display, highlighted his scholarly encounters with the topic of internment many years ago. Main speaker, Draga Dragasevic, who had collaborated with the Museum concerning Project CTO, delivered her power point overview of the history and context of Canada's First National Internment Operations. She explained the mandate of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund and highlighted the dichotomy of the situation of the Serbs in Canada, some who were interned and some who were free.

In the absence of Dr. Marinel Mandres, Cathy Diklich, exhibit committee member, read his presentation entitled “Loyal Enemy Aliens: The Internment of Ethnic Serbs and Romanians during the Great War 1914-1920” which featured some details of his initial research concerning the Serbian internees and military aspects of the war environment in Canada at the time. According to Dr. Mandres, Serbia's Consul General in the USA, Mihajlo Pupin, advocated for the release of Serbian prisoners. In early 1919 the Serbian Consul in Canada, Antun Seferovic, sent Bozidar Markovich, Secretary of the Srpska Narodna Odbrana, to the Kapuskasing camp where he recommend-

ed the release of the Serbs. The Odbrana had a tremendously important role in the liberation of these disillusioned internees as a strong guarantor for their loyalty. On the other hand, almost 16,000 young Serbian immigrants from the USA and Canada had voluntarily registered with the Serbian and Canadian armies to fight across European fronts. Mobilisation camps were established in Canada to process the new volunteers. These military missions were possible because the Kingdom of Serbia and Canada were allies.

Hamilton and Windsor. When the War Measures Act was enforced in 1914, all immigrants labelled “enemy aliens” had to register with the government; approximately 9,000 were arrested and sent to one of 24 internment camps in Canada's hinterlands, the majority Ukrainians. The remaining 80,000 “enemy aliens” had to report regularly to authorities and practice extreme caution during rampant wartime paranoia growing in the general population.

The internment exhibit focuses on five themes. The Canadian theme shows the War Measures Act enforced on August 22, 1914 and portraits of Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and Governor General, the Duke of Connaught. The second theme shows a map of Europe and portraits of three Kaisers and notes the failed peace efforts after the assassination of Archduke



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A delicious lunch was prepared by the Serbian Community Centre and served by Museum volunteers. To conclude the program, MC Jim Crichton delivered a pleasant surprise when he read Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne's online press release commemorating this historic occasion.

Committee members, who worked tirelessly and enthusiastically on the research, exhibit preparation, ceremony and program to mark the 100th anniversary of the War Measures Act were: Anne Dube, Draga Chuk, Cathy Diklich, Dr. Brian Owens, Julka Vlajic and Milos Savic, videographer of the event.

The committee's work reminded Serbs of 256 of their brethren who had lost their freedom, civil rights, property and means to support their families and who had done hard labour in extremely difficult conditions. Of those, 164 Serbs were interned in the Kapuskasing camp. Dr. Mandres' research may show that the total number of Serbian internees was even higher. They were single, young workers in mines across northern Ontario or factories in Toronto,

Franz Ferdinand. The third display shows a map of the internment camps from Nova Scotia to British Columbia and a pamphlet on Canada's First National Internment Operations. The large TV screen featured the engrossing 1994 National Film Board documentary by Yuriy Luhovy called “Freedom Had a Price”. The fourth theme, and perhaps the most interesting for Serbs, displays an Austro-Hungarian passport, a WWI Kingdom of Serbia Commemorative Medal and the Order of the White Eagle medal, two WWI posters appealing for humanitarian aid for Serbia, a 1984 Serbian Heritage Academy of Canada poster promoting a ceremony honouring University of Toronto doctors and nurses who went to aid Serbia, Canada's ally, and a French poster honouring King Petar I. The final display focuses on the aftermath of the Great War with a facsimile of the Treaty of Versailles, the Canadian Bill of Rights and Freedoms, a quote by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and a poem by Thomas Hardy. It is on display at the Serbian Heritage Museum until December.

Many countries have commemorated the centennial of WWI placing blame and remembering the millions of fallen. The Serbian Heritage Museum and all who contributed to the realization of this exhibit and program called the attention of the Serbian and Canadian public to this unjust and dark period in our Canadian history. It is hoped that this history will serve as a reminder of the significance of human rights guaranteed to each Canadian citizen. It was a tragic episode which we must always remember, understand and learn from.

Tanja Zec-O'Neill