



Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund

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INTERNMENT CAMP ARTIFACTS SOUGHT

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A dark piece of Lethbridge's past will be brought to light, out of the basements, attics and cedar chests of descendants who might not even know what injustices their ancestors have endured.

That's the hope for an organization dedicated to recognizing Canada's internment camps, which imprisoned immigrants during the First World War.

The federal government set up the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund three years ago with a one-time endowment of \$10 million, to be used for educating Canadians about the internment camps, 24 of which operated across the country from 1914 to 1920, imprisoning more than 8,000.

Lethbridge's camp operated on the Exhibition grounds from Sept. 30, 1914 to Nov. 7, 1916, imprisoning mostly Germans and Austrians while Canada was first at war with those countries.

Now, the organization is calling for artifacts from the camps as it works on education material to make Canadians more knowledgeable about Canada's first internment camps, hoping families of those imprisoned - none of those interned during the First World War are still alive - will find documents or records.

"They may not even know what they may have, because obviously it wasn't something talked about. These people were unjustly interned but then they were ashamed and they were scared and they never talked about it to their families," said Andrea Malysh, the Fund's program manager. "A lot of internee descendants actually have contacted us who've never made themselves known before, which helps build the list because the only list we have of internees is really incomplete."

Malysh said governments have tried to hide this shameful part of history, destroying most of the relevant documents in the 1950s.

But photo albums, parole papers, paintings and items the prisoners made while in the work camps, including a wood cabinet inscribed with prisoners' names, have turned up. All the artifacts, with the exception of the cabinet, which came from the camps in Fernie/Morrissey, are housed at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ont.

"With families finding out that this happened, (they can) acknowledge that they were unjustly interned, unjustly treated, and they might find some sense of closure," said Malysh.

Today the Winnipeg-based organization is launching a new resource book for high school students, called Prisoners of Prejudice, that will soon be distributed in every Alberta high school, developed by the Edmonton Public school board to add to current curriculum about the internment camps.

Although Alberta is the first to add more educational materials about the internment camps, Malysh said, the organization has no artifacts from the Lethbridge camp, which housed up to 300 prisoners and was formally recognized with a plaque at the Exhibition grounds in 1997.

This part of Canada's history is important to remember, Malysh said.

"This is something 100 years old that the Canadian government tried to bury and did not want Canadians to know that they had done this, that this had happened. It's really important that we write this into our education system. We need to know about it, we need to learn from our mistakes," she said.

"It could still happen again."

For more information, visit www.internmentcanada.ca or phone Malysh toll-free at 1-866-288-7931.

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