

'Mysterious group' subject of research

Brantford Expositor, 31 December 2009

by Heather Ibbotson

A local historical researcher is seeking to uncloak the mystery surrounding a 1914 Brantford roundup of Turkish Muslim foundry workers and their subsequent internment at a camp in Kapuskasing.

Bill Darfler, a researcher for the Ontario Visual Heritage Project, has received a grant of \$5,000 for the project from the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund.

The fund, established in 2008, was set up to support projects to study and recognize the experiences of ethnocultural communities affected by Canada's first national internment operations of 1914 to 1920.

In November 1914 about 100 men were rounded up by city police and transported several days later to an internment camp in Kapuskasing, Darfler said.

"This was a mysterious group of people and there are few records," he said.

The small Turkish community was comprised of men only, many of whom boarded downtown in houses owned at the time by members of the city's Armenian community, he said.

Some of the men had resided locally for about 10 years and some had Canadian citizenship, which was stripped from them when they were interned, he said.

The event is a largely overlooked incident in Brantford's history and trying to delve into its reasons and consequences is a lot like chasing ghosts, Darfler said.

"They were shadowy creatures," said Darfler, adding that only a handful of the men's names were reported in the news coverage of the time.

The best-case scenario would be to find a list of the men who were interned but it is believed that any such records from the First and Second World Wars were destroyed in the 1950s, he said.

The end result of Darfler's project depends on the scope and content of information he is able to uncover over the course of the next year but he hopes to prepare a presentation of his findings.

Can you help?

Researcher Bill Darfler is studying the roundup in Brantford in 1914 of Turkish Muslim foundry workers. He asks anyone with any information, sources, or even vague family stories about the event to contact him at wmdarfler@gmail.com or 519-756-2805.