

# Launch of Quebec Internment Spirit Lake Interpretive Centre

La Ferme, Quebec - With the cutting of a barbed wire symbolizing the Spirit Lake Internment site, on July 8, 2010, the Camp Spirit Lake Corporation officially launched the construction of the Spirit Lake Interpretive Centre in La Ferme, near Amos, Quebec. Spirit Lake was one of 24 internment camps established between 1914-1920 during Canada's first internment operations.

Present at the press conference officially announcing the launch of the future historic Centre at the Corporation's administrative headquarters were the Mayor of Amos, Ulrick Chubain, as well as Suzanne Larochelle, representative of the Municipality of Trecesson in Northern Quebec.



*(Left to Right): UCC Quebec President Zorianna Hrycenko-Luhova; CSLC President James Slobodian; Mayor of Amos Ulrick Chubain; Shevchenko Foundation President Andrij Hladyshovsky; Municipality of Trecesson representative Suzanne Larochelle*

At the opening ceremony, James Slobodian, President of Camp Spirit Lake Corporation stated "The mission is to ensure the protection, conservation and interpretation of the historical site and the promotion of the municipality's cultural heritage". The Spirit Lake internment site was the second largest site in Canada, in which 1,200 men, women, and children were unjustly interned as enemy aliens, the majority being Ukrainian. From Montreal's St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church, 60 families were taken.

Other speakers included Laurier Parent, the project architect, and Rene Levesque, the Corporation's board member and MC for the afternoon's ceremony.

The Interpretive Centre has been 12 years in the making. Within the last 3 years, the project has made remarkable headway, spearheaded by James Slobodian of Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec. In 2007, the Corporation, with the co-operation of church authorities, bought the La Ferme Church

in order to establish the historic Centre. The Centre's construction, which retains only the exterior of the solidly-built building, is to be completed in five months. The Centre's official opening is scheduled for November-December 2010. The project is estimated to cost over 1.2 million dollars, factoring in the enormous voluntary work done by individuals on this project. The largest monetary assistance comes from the federally funded Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund intended for projects such as the Spirit Lake Interpretive Centre.

Since 1999, archeological excavations have been taking place on the former site of the prison camp, which was built during World War I, at the beginning of the colonisation of the Abitibi region in Northern Quebec.

Attending the launch was Andrij Hladyshevsky from Edmonton, President of the Shevchenko Foundation and board member of the Internment Recognition Fund. Speaking mainly in French, he underlined the importance of preserving Canada's history, praised the organizers for their remarkable work and promised continued support for the project. He concluded with the singing of the moving "Vichnaya Pamyat" in memory of those internees buried at the soon-to-be-restored Spirit Lake cemetery near-by.

Speaking on behalf of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress Quebec Provincial Council and Montreal Branch was its president, Zorianna Hrycenko-Luhova who has worked on the internment issue from the early 1970s. She emphasized the importance of educating future generations regarding the unjust internment and incorporating teaching about the internment story in Quebec and other provinces across Canada. Also present were Ghislain Drolet who worked on the project for many years and Marie Kureluk, a recent member of the Corporation's board of directors.

During the launch, a donation of newspapers from France dated between 1915 and 1917 containing articles about the internment at Spirit Lake, was presented by Jean Turgeon to the archival section of the Centre for use by future researchers.

Covering this major internment project were the French-language television station Radio-Canada which provides coverage throughout the province; television station TVA; Quebec-Or newspapers as well as other local media. A special interview was conducted by Montreal's "Ukrainian Time" radio program about the event with Mr. Slobodian and the President of UCC Montreal.

To help with the additional funds still needed to complete the project, the Hon. Denis Lebel, Minister of State for Canada Economic Development announced a grant for \$152,120 through the Community Diversification program towards the internment camp Interpretive Centre.

In a press release inserted into each participant's information kit, Mr. Lebel stated "The Spirit Lake internment camp is part of our history and a key element in the development of this corner of Abitibi. This is why it is essential that its memory be preserved. The camp at Spirit Lake is a unique site that played a distinctive role in Canadian history." Mr. Slobodian thanked his team for their dedication and hard work in making this project a reality.

During the reception that followed, sponsored by various local businesses in Amos, a daughter of parents who lived next to the internment site in 1915, recalled her parents' description about how internees would enter the local church for Sunday Services, encircled by guards with bayonets to ensure everyone returned back to the internment site after prayers. She will be

interviewed by the Camp Spirit Lake Corporation to document valuable eye-witness information still available about the daily life of the internee-prisoners.

This year also marks the 95<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the camp in 1915. An overview of Canada's first internment operations, including Spirit Lake, is available in the award-winning documentary film "Freedom Had A Price" see [www.yluhovy.com](http://www.yluhovy.com). Researchers may access rare photos depicting the Spirit Lake internment camp discovered by Yuriy Luhovy which he donated to the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. He named the donation "The Palmer Collection" after the soldier stationed at Spirit Lake who took the over 100 nitrate film photos, given to Mr. Luhovy by the soldier's daughters. For further information on the historic Spirit Lake Interpretive Centre project, contact James Slobodian at [campspiritlake@cableamos.com](mailto:campspiritlake@cableamos.com)