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OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE QUEBEC SPIRIT LAKE INTERNMENT INTERPRETIVE CENTER

La Ferme, Quebec – November 24, 2011 marked the official opening of the Camp Spirit Lake Corporation Internment Interpretive Centre in La Ferme, near Amos, Quebec. Spirit Lake was one of the twenty four internment camps that were established in Canada during the First World War. The Spirit Lake internment site was the second largest site in Canada, in which up to 1,312 men, women, and children were unjustly interned as enemy aliens. The majority of those interned at this site were of Ukrainian descent, of which 60 families were taken from Montreal's St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church. The other affected communities included Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, Croatians, Turks, Serbians, Hungarians and Romanians. The historical materials collected in this centre document the experiences of entire families, who found themselves confined within a barbed wire fence.

The Interpretive Centre has been over twelve years in the making. Within the last four years, the project has made remarkable headway, spearheaded by Mr. 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. Since 1999, archeological excavations have been taking place on the former site of the Spirit Lake Internment Camp, which was built during the First World War, at the beginning of the colonization of the Abitibi region in Northern Quebec.

The last known survivor of the Spirit Lake Internment Camp was Mary Manko, who passed away at age 98, in July 2007. Mary's sister, Nellie (Carolka) Manko, not quite three years old at the time, perished at Spirit Lake. Mary Manko was quoted in 1994 stating, "What was done to us was wrong. Because no one bothered to remember or learn about the wrong that was done to us it was done to others again, and yet again. Maybe there's an even greater wrong in that."

The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism was among a hundred invited guests that attended the opening of the Interpretive Centre, which generated significant local, national and international media coverage. Hon. Kenney was accompanied by fellow

Members of Parliament from the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Friendship group, including James Bezan, Peter Goldring and Bernard Trottier.

Minister Kenney stated: “Our Government was proud to establish the Canadian Historical Recognition Program which has sought to teach future generations of Canadians about the often forgotten aspects of our past that, while unsettling, are important to remember. I am pleased that this interpretation centre, funded in part by the Government of Canada, embraces this mission.”

Andrew Hladyshevsky Q.C., President of the Shevchenko Foundation and Vice-Chair of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund stated, “The Quebec Spirit Lake Internment Interpretation Centre will serve as a permanent memorial to those Ukrainians and other Europeans who were unjustly interned, not because of who they were, but from where they came from. This project will make an outstanding contribution to the remembrance of the internment and will educate Canadians about this tragic page in Canada’s history.” He concluded his speech mainly spoken in French, with the singing of the moving “Vichnaya Pamyat” (Memory Eternal) in memory of those internees buried at the nearby Spirit Lake cemetery.

A prayer service was given by Mgr. Gilles Lemay, Bishop of the Diocese of Amos along with Rev. Father Robert Lalonde, the last priest of the St- Viateur Church, which is now the Administration Centre that houses the Spirit Lake Camp Interpretation Centre. Also, joining them in this service was Rev. Father Theofan Heto of Kirkland Lake, Ontario, representing His Grace Bishop Stephen Chmilar, of the Toronto Eparchy Ukrainian Catholic Church Eastern Canada; Rev. Father Volodymyr Kouchnir, Dean of the Montreal- Ottawa District of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, representing His Grace, Bishop Andriy of the Eastern Eparchy; and Rev. Father Dr. Ihor Kutash of Montreal representing the Ukrainian National Federation of Canada on behalf of Taras Pidzamecky, National President.

This project is the largest grant approved and funded by the Endowment Council of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund.

About CFWWIRF

The Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund (CFWWIRF) was established to support projects that commemorate and recognize the experiences of all of the ethno-cultural communities affected by Canada’s first national internment operations of 1914 to 1920.

For more information on this event or the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund contact the Program Manager, Andrea Malysh, toll free at 1-866-288-7931.



Photo courtesy of Taras Zalusky
(left to right):

Mr. James Bezan, M.P. Selkirk- Interlake, the Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, Mr. Andrew Hladyshevsky, Q.C. Chair of the Shevchenko Foundation and Vice-Chair of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, Mr. James Slobodian, President of Camp Spirit Lake Corporation and Mr. Bernard Trottier, M.P. Etobicoke-Lakeshore.