



PRESS RELEASE (with photo)

Unique 1916 Artifact Donated to Spirit Lake Centre, Quebec

Spirit Lake, Quebec A unique donation by, Pauline Qessy dating back from 1916 has been made this summer to Canada's first established internment museum at Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Centre located at Abitibi, Trecesson (La Ferme), Quebec. This donation, of significant historic and sentimental value to both the donor and the Centre, is of a hand-made, intricately crafted frame of a portrait of Pauline Qessy's paternal grandfather, Raymond Qessy, a guard at Spirit Lake. This frame, made by an internee-prisoner at Spirit Lake, had long ago presented this handmade gift to his guard on May 5, 1916.

"It's another piece of the internment story", commented Caroline Parent, Communications coordinator and Researcher at Camp Spirit Lake Center. "The artifact reflects how a prisoner interned at Spirit Lake in 1916, eventually created a friendship with the guard, Raymond Qessy, that is depicted in the donated, framed picture of the guard. This donation shows us another dynamic, to which point some prisoners, unjustly interned, created a bond with the guards that held them. It also depicts how resourceful the internees were, trying to pass any free time they had in creative ways."

Caroline Parent further stated, "This unexpected donation has an inestimable value. This donation dating back to 1916, brings to life and shares the story of the many details of Canada's First National Internment Operations 1914-20 and specifically, as it relates to the second largest internment site at Spirit Lake in which the majority were Ukrainians that were held."

To help make this early history better known and understood, Pauline Qessy thought it was important to give to the interpretation Center that memory of her paternal grandfather that was so precious to her for so many years. "I want the public and future generations to know about this early history. I'm sure my grandfather and my father, Jean Paul Qessy, would be very pleased with my decision and the steps that I am taking today", Pauline added.

Pauline's grandfather, Raymond Qessy, arrived in Abitibi in 1912, at the same time as Georges Thibault, who was also a guard at Spirit Lake Internment site. Georges Thibault later married the sister of another guard, and her name was Marie-Louise. The internee that made the frame was a prisoner at Spirit Lake with the registration number 886 and gave it to the grandfather Raymond Qessy, as a kind gesture. The challenge is now to learn the name of internee number 886.

Pauline Qessy further continued, "They told me that the prisoner 886 used nails as his tools to carve the intricately made frame. I have had this frame with the photo of my grandfather in my possession since 1972. I asked my father about five years ago, who gave the frame to me, if I could donate this piece

of internment history to the Spirit Lake museum, so that my grandfather's name and the internee would be remembered. My father agreed, although unfortunately he since passed away before I could get into contact with the Centre to make this happen. I am pleased this historic artifact is now in this Museum's permanent collection for future researchers and visitors. ", stated Pauline

The chairperson of Spirit Lake Centre is James Slobodian. To visit or for more information about the internment interpretive Center of Camp Spirit Lake, please see www.campspiritlake.ca or obtain internment DVD documentaries at www.yluhovy.com

This year, Spirit Lake Internment Centre once again broke last year's records in the number of visitors including students and teachers that came to see the Museum with its guided tours, learning more about the internment history. Visitors come from Montreal, all over Quebec and the rest of Canada.

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Photo:

Credit: Martin Guindon, journalist for L'Abitibi Express

Pauline Qessy at the Camp Spirit Lake Internment Interpretive Centre holding her unique donation dated from 1916 made by Spirit Lake internee number 886.

