

# Plaques honour Ukrainian internment victims

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A photo of Ukrainian women and children interned in Canada with their guards at Spirit Lake during the First World War. (Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation)

MONTREAL — At 16, Anne Sadelain's father lied about his age to get into Canada. Five years later, in 1915, he was picked up by police in Vancouver and brought to an internment camp in Morrissey, B.C.

Sadelain said her father committed no crime and posed no threat to the country. Instead, he was locked up because he was Ukrainian.

"They were looking for people like him," she says. "There was no reason, really. Because these people hadn't caused any problem, but they claimed they might go back and fight for the Emperor."

On Friday, 100 plaques were unveiled throughout Canada to mark the 100 years since the passage of the War Measures Act and the beginning of Canada's internment camps.

Sadelain spoke at an unveiling in Edmonton, while her daughter, Carole, attended a plaque unveiling at the Ukrainian Youth Centre in Montreal.

"I pretty much grew up knowing about this," Carole Sadelain said. "But it was not widely known. There was no government recognition at all."

Official government recognition in 2005 of internment victims, including Wasel Doskoch, Anne Sadelain's father, brought some relief after descendants' long campaign for recognition.

"It's hard to explain," Carole Sadelain says, "It feels right. It feels like, 'ah, finally.'"

The Morrissey internment camp was one of 24 internment camps for "enemy aliens" that were living in Canada during the First World War. After the passage of the War Measures Act in 1914, police began arresting and detaining immigrants and naturalized citizens from Germany and the Austro-Hungarian empire — which then encompassed Ukraine — and sending them to the labour camps, where they worked long hours and for little or no pay.

In total, almost 8,500 people were arrested and detained, an estimated 5,000 from Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association. Doskoch spent time in four different camps from 1915 to 1920.

"(Morrissey) was a difficult camp," Anne Sadelain says. She retells stories that prisoners were walked long distances every day for work, put on a very meagre diet of potatoes and boiled pork, and punished for protesting.

Doskoch died when Anne Sadelain was only eight. Although she has many memories from stories her mother told as she was growing up, it wasn't until about 30 years ago that she began to advocate for recognition from the Canadian government of what had been done.

"I had been living in France for 45 years and I had come back and had started to teach again," Anne Sadelain, now 82, explains. "I was teaching a Grade 9 social class, and I saw in the curriculum there was the Japanese issue of the Second World War, but they weren't teaching anything about the Ukrainian and Austro-Hungarian issue of the First World War."

Sadelain and her brother started gathering what information they could find and wrote letters to government officials — Jean Chrétien, Brian Mulroney, Sheila Copps and Jason Kenney, she says.

"My mother (knew about it), and later we questioned her somewhat, but not as much as I wish we had when I started to work on this with my brother in the '80s," she says. "My mother died in the '80s so we didn't get a chance to really ask her all the questions I would have liked to."

In 2001, after her brother died, a chance encounter with other internee descendants led to the foundation of DUCIVA, the Descendants of Ukrainian Canadian Internee Victims Association, a group that continued to lobby the Canadian government.

DUCIVA worked with the Edmonton Public Schools board, where Anne Sadelain now resides, to launch a teaching guide for the Ukrainian-Canadian section of the high-school curriculum in 2011.

They also met with the Canadian government during the negotiations leading up to the creation of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund, but did not secure a voting seat for descendants on the fund's board of directors.

According to Lubomyr Luciuk and Andrew Hladyshevsky, two board members who negotiated the terms of the fund with the federal government, the government set that condition to try to maintain a balance between the Ukrainian Community and other affected communities.

The Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration was not available for comment.

As descendants, Anne Sadelain said their parents are the real reason why the fund exists. She doesn't feel as included in the direction of the fund as she would like.

"This is something we feel quite strongly about," she says.

Still, the recognition from the federal government has brought some relief to her and her family.

“I’m very happy that there has been some recognition,” she says. “We wanted recognition and we got that. We wanted reconciliation, I think they have — for the Ukrainian Community, for the other nations, I think they got reconciliation. For the descendants, we don’t quite feel reconciled to it yet.”

The legacy of Doskoch still runs through the Sadelain family, according to Carole Sadelain. Traces of a man who later became a political activist can be found even in the youngest generations.

“I’ve never met my grandfather,” says Carole Sadelain. “but I look at my brother, and I look at my niece, and I feel like there’s that thing. That spirit.”

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