

'Injustice' of internment camps remembered in Windsor ceremony

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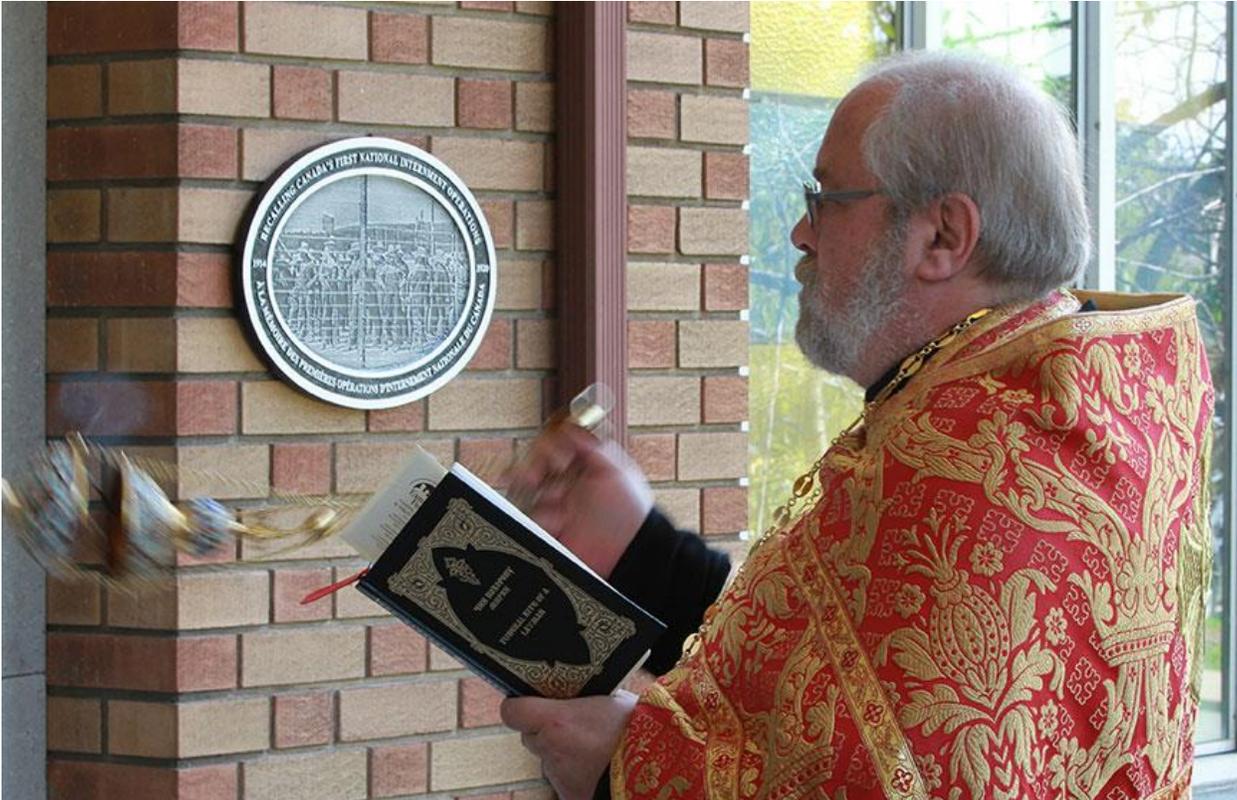


PHOTO: Jason Kryk, The Windsor Star

Rev. Roman Kocur offers a blessing during the unveiling of a plaque commemorating the internment of 8,579 people from 1914 to 1920. The ceremony was held at the Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral of St. Vladimir on Tecumseh Road East in Windsor.

Stripped of their homes, farms and other belongings, and branded as “enemy aliens,” these are the memories many Ukrainians and other Europeans in Windsor cannot forget. Churches and cultural centres across Canada unveiled 100 plaques in unison Friday morning, commemorating the 100th anniversary of Canada’s first national internment operation of 1914-1920.

“An injustice is being corrected today,” said Rev. Roman Kocur from the St. Vladimir’s Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral. “We don’t want this to happen again.”

St. Vladimir’s Ukrainian Orthodox Cathedral, Sts. Vladimir and Olga Ukrainian Catholic Church and the [Serbian Heritage Museum](#) were three locations in Windsor unveiling the plaques at 11 a.m. Ukrainian, Croatian, Serbian, German and Hungarian churches and cultural centres, as well as local

and regional museums and other public venues, created a wave of presentations moving from Nova Scotia to British Columbia.

The summer of 2014 marks the centenary of the beginning of the First World War.

Many immigrants were swayed to move to Canada in the late 1800s with the promise of land and freedom.

But they were later branded “enemy aliens” because the countries they came from were at war with this country.

During the conflict, Ukrainians and other Europeans in Canada – men, women and children – were put in 24 internment camps, surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards.

Ivanna Nimchuk, secretary at St. Vladimir’s, said many of them were forced to do heavy labour.

Now, 100 aluminum plaques recalling Canada’s first national internment operations, and illustrated with artwork from a concentration camp, can now be seen from coast to coast



*The plaque shows men behind a barbed wire fence.
Jason Kryk, The Windsor Star*

There was an emotional service at the front doors of St. Vladimir’s on Friday.

More than 50 attended, including mayoral candidate Drew Dilkens, Ward 5 Coun. Ed Sleiman and members from Windsor West MP Brian Masse’s office, to witness the unveiling.

Friday’s presentation hit home for Nimchuk. She said her grandparents were put in internment camps in Manitoba.

Unfortunately, she said, it was a difficult experience for them and they never talked about it.

Her grandparents, Roman and Mary Nimchuk, moved to Canada in the late 1890s. She said they were stripped of all their belongings and forced into heavy labour during the internment operations.

This happened not because they did anything wrong, she said, but only because of whom they were and where they had come from.

“Most people don’t know anything about this,” Nimchuk said. “And the people who lived through that have since passed away.”

She said this is the first time in Canadian history a community has attempted to unveil 100 historical plaques from coast to coast in unison.

Dilkens said when he looks back at Canadian history, the period of time surrounding the internment camps sticks out to him.

“It doesn’t represent the Canadian values we have today,”

Dilkens said. “It’s important to recognize this so it doesn’t happen again in the future.”

Beginning in 1994, the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Association started placing historical markers to recall the internment operations, hoping to eventually have a plaque at each of the 24 internment camp sites.

The 100-plaque project was launched with support from the [Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation](#) and the Endowment Council of the Canadian First World War Internment Recognition Fund.

Nimchuk said she has been overwhelmed with the reception from communities across Canada.

More churches and centres have come forward, she said, which may lead to more than 100 plaques going up across the country.

“This emotional attachment goes very deep,” said attendee Fred Kushnir. “We’re all one community. When one of us hurts, we all hurt.”

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