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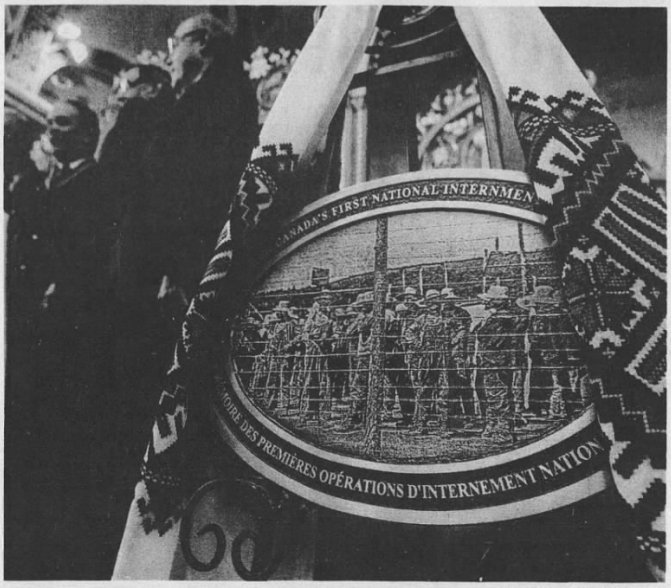

Crystal Schick/Calgary Herald

Members of the Order of St. Andrew from St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Church stand near a centennial plaque at the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church. On Friday, 100 plaques were unveiled nationwide to honour the 100 years since Canada's first national internment operations.

Plaques mark internment of Ukrainian immigrants

MANISHA KRISHNAN
CALGARY HERALD

Calgary's Ukrainian community reflected on a dark chapter of Canadian history Friday with the unveiling of three plaques to commemorate the internment of Ukrainian immigrants during the First World War.

The plaques, which depict images of internees with the caption "Recalling Canada's First National Internment Operations," are being unveiled at Eastern European cultural hubs across Canada as part of the Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties Foundation's CTO (one hundred) project. There are 100 of them in honour of the 100th anniversary of the War Measures Act.

"We hallow the memory of all internees, and remind all Canadians of the need to remain vigilant in defence of human rights," said Borys Sydoruk, a spokesman with the UCCLF, at a ceremony at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church in northeast Calgary.

Hundreds of Ukrainians were imprisoned at Castle Mountain Internment Camp in Banff from 1915 to 1917.

Most, Sydoruk said, were single, young men, lured to Canada with the promise of free land and a better life. In camps, they were forced to do hard labour.

"Think of the emotional scars that these people had," said Sydoruk, whose voice caught several times during his speech. "Most of these men never told their spouses they were interned. They were ashamed."

There were 24 internment camps set up across Canada from 1914-20, all of which have now been commemorated with a plaque.

Alberta Premier Dave Hancock called the plaques project "a valuable opportunity for us to stand in solidarity with our Ukrainian community."

Halya Wilson, also a member of the UCCLF, said its purpose is to raise awareness about the internment.

"I grew up in Canada and I didn't know about it," she said, adding some schools now include it in their curriculum. "The first time I heard about it, I was shocked."

It's important to remember history to avoid the mistakes of the past, added parishioner Andrew Ilnycky.

"When war breaks out, xenophobia takes over and certain groups of immigrants or people who are settling in the country are marginalized," he said.

One of the Calgary plaques will remain at Blessed Virgin, while the other two will be stationed at St. Stephen's Promartyr Ukrainian Catholic Church and St. Vladimir's Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

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