

FIRST CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP CEREMONY

First Recipient, First Oath and First Canadian Citizenship Ceremony

■ On January 1, 1947, the **Canadian Citizen Act** came into force under Liberal government of the Hon. Prime Minister William, Lyon, McKenzie King (1935-1948).

Prior to 1947, Canada was a nation of British subjects living in Canada. The importance of introducing this bill to the House of Commons by the Hon. Paul Martin Sr. (father of former Liberal Prime Minister Paul E. P. Martin Jr. (2003-2006) can be captured in his own words: "for the national unity of Canada and for the future and greatness of this country it is felt to be of utmost importance that all of us, new Canadians or old, have a consciousness of a common purpose and common interests as Canadians; that all of us are able to say with pride and say with meaning: 'I am a Canadian citizen.'"^{**}



Wasył Eleniak (b. December 22, 1859, v. Nebyliw, Western Ukraine), poor herdsman, logger and family man who arrived in Canada on September 7, 1891, initially laboring in Gretna, Manitoba (six and one half years) and homesteaded in Edna/Star, Alberta. He was one of the twenty-six to be honored.

He recollected: "I just knelt down and they gave me the papers. I bowed my head, thanked them, got up and went and sat down on the side."^{**}

The Hon. Paul Martin Sr., Minister of National Health and Welfare at the time of the ceremony and the Member of Parliament to introduce the bill that became the Canadian Citizenship Act wrote a letter to Wasył Eleniak dated January 16, 1947.



He stated: "The selection of yourself to participate in the ceremony was a mark of our esteem for the contribution you have made to Canada by your life and your work in this country. Canada is proud to number you among its citizens."^{**}

Wasył Eleniak's humble sentiment about this honor is purportedly as follows:

"I accept this not for myself or for my glory, but for all Ukrainian people in Canada. The government, through me, has shown its gratitude to all Ukrainians for their integrity and loyalty to their new land."^{**}

January 1, 2017 marks the **70 Anniversary of the Canadian Citizenship Act** (1947) along with the honor bestowed on Wasył Eleniak. It is most appropriate to re-acknowledge and re-commemorate this milestone in Canadian Ukrainian history paralleling the **125 Anniversary of Ukrainian settlement** and pioneering of Canada.

Wasył Eleniak's photographic portrait was captured by Jousuf Karsh, the internationally acclaimed photographer and also recipient of the same citizenship honor.

* <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/1947-the-first-official-canadian-citizens>

** Nay, A., Marshall Trailblazers of Ukrainian Immigration to Canada. Brightest Pebble Publishing Co. Ltd Edmonton, 1997. pp.146-47)

—Submitted by Luba Fedorkiw



Mackenzie King's Citizenship Certificate

On January 3, 1947, Chief Justice Thibauudeau Rinfret, at the Supreme Court of Canada in our nation's capital, Ottawa, Ontario bestowed **Prime Minister William, Lyon, McKenzie King** "0001" Series A, the first honorary Canadian Citizenship Certificate. Prime Minister King's speech powerfully underscored this fact: "Without citizenship, much else is meaningless."^{**}

At this auspicious ceremony 26 people sat on benches at the front room in the Great Chamber waiting for their names to be called and recorded into Canadian history. The event was broadcast nationally on radio and cameras took footage.

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