

## CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF UKRAINIAN HERITAGE



Tony Zerucha

■ It's an important year for the 1.4 million Ukrainians in Canada as they celebrate both the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian immigration to Canada and the 25th anniversary of Ukrainian independence. Events are planned across the province.

Dr. Roman Yereniuk said Ukrainian migration to Canada can be separated into four distinct waves. Yereniuk is an associate professor at St. Andrew's College and a sessional instructor at the University of Manitoba's Centre for Ukrainian Studies.

#### The first wave: 1891-1913

The first wave began in 1891 and ended on the eve of the First World War. In 1891, Russia controlled the central and eastern portions of Ukraine while the Austro-Hungarian empire reigned in the west. Western Ukrainians made up most of that initial wave.

"Under the Austro-Hungarian empire there was a pretty liberal policy for people to leave," Yereniuk explained.

And plenty did. Most Ukrainian farming families were large, but only had small plots of land to cultivate at home.

"There was no way they could survive into the next generation," Yereniuk said. Enticed by free land in Canada, these *hliboroby* (farmers) travelled to Germany before sailing to Halifax and taking the train to Winnipeg, which played a key role, "sort of a transition point," Yereniuk said.

After arriving at the CP station on Higgins Avenue and Main Street, people crossed Main to an immigration centre and purchased newspapers and books at the nearby Canadian Farmer newspaper.

Most people stayed in Winnipeg for a few days before setting out for farmland either along the railway which parallels the current Yellowhead Highway, or south to towns such as Gardenon, Tolstoi and Vita. They found the

sandy and rocky soil better for mixed farming than for grain. Others tried the Interlake, where they found community with Icelandic settlers. People then began to go west to the area around Riding Mountain National Park, populating towns like Dauphin, Oakburn, Rosburn and Gilbert Plains.

Not all Ukrainians came to farm, Yereniuk cautioned. They were attracted by the urban setting and often found work at one of the railways and housing nearby.

"Point Douglas and the Weston-Brooklands area were the cultural centres for Ukrainians," Yereniuk said. "The shortest way to go from one community to the other to see a concert or another event was to walk along the railway tracks.

"The first wave were really risk-takers. They were young, full of energy, and wanted to see the world."

Taming the land and learning a new language and culture were not the only challenges those risk takers faced. From 1914 to 1920, some 8,000 Ukrainians and other citizens of the Austro-Hungarian empire were forced into internment camps due to fears of loyalty to Canada's enemy in the First World War.

#### The second wave: 1920-1931

The second wave of Ukrainian immigration occurred between 1920 and 1931. On average, they were better educated. They also branched out into a wider range of occupations.

Most still came to farm the 160 acres of land, but found themselves with some free time in the winter so they took on seasonal work such as lumber harvesting. With reputations as hard workers, Ukrainians also found jobs in mines and with railways.

"They earned decent money and were good workers. A lot would work the 10-hour day and not complain."

For some, a condition of accessing that wider pool of opportunity meant compromise, Yereniuk said.

"In those first two waves, many had surnames which were difficult to pronounce. The Anglo community attempted to Anglicize them and a significant number either shortened or changed their names in order to get jobs."

The seeds of the third wave began to form shortly after the second wave ended. In 1932 and 1933, between four



Teacher Yuriy Genyk poses with a class in front of the Ukrainian National Home Association's *Ridna Shkola*, or heritage school, in this 1916 photo. The building at the corner of Burrows Avenue and McGregor Street is still standing.

PHOTO FROM THE UKRAINIAN NATIONAL HOME OF WINNIPEG PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, PC 331. U OF M ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

and five million Ukrainians perished during the *Holodomor*, the Ukrainian word for "extermination by hunger". Recognized as a genocide by Canada and more than one dozen other countries, the *Holodomor* is viewed by most historians as an attempt by Stalinist Russia to nullify the Ukrainian independence movement through the elimination of its middle class.

#### The third wave: 1948-1955

The third wave began at the end of the Second World War at a time when Ukrainians were scattered across central and western Europe. Within five years Ukraine had been taken over by the Soviet Union, Germany, and the Soviet Union again.

"They are sometimes referred to as political refugees," Yereniuk said. "Many came from Austria, Germany, Belgium and a little from Holland. Either the Germans brought them out of the Ukraine to work in the farms or they escaped."

The initial lack of a Canadian immigration policy forced many Ukrainians to live in military camps for as long as three years before they could come to Canada. Once they were approved they had some help, Yereniuk said.

"One of the things that is not mentioned much in our history is many Ukrainian individuals in Canada as well as institutions guaranteed to pay for the cost of the ship fare for them to come to Canada."

Ukrainians already established in Canada sponsored new immigrants. Yereniuk's parents were sponsored by a single man whom they took several years to repay, he said.

Out of that collective effort came the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Formed in 1940, it played a key role in encouraging the federal government to approve mass immigration.

The third wave directly benefited from Ukrainian Canadians' strong contributions to the war effort, Yereniuk said.

"Ukrainians gave the most sons and daughters to fight in the Second World War in proportion to any other ethnic group in Canada. When they came back after four or five years they weren't thought of as Ukrainians they were told 'You are now Canadian'."

"This began to change the image of Ukrainians. We proved that we were loyal to Canada."

This opened doors to many professions, though not the entire way.

"I'd say it was harder for a newly graduated Ukrainian-Canadian lawyer to get a job with a big firm," Yereniuk said. "Many formed their own smaller one."

The third wave was less interested in agriculture, Yereniuk said. More were from the middle class and better educated. Some were professionals but faced obstacles once they attempted to re-establish themselves in Canada.

"You didn't know the language so you took a menial job," Yereniuk said.

For some those menial jobs were temporary measures, Yereniuk said. They learned English and attended university, graduating and establishing a presence in many professions including at the new school of social work at the University of Manitoba.

#### Ukrainians in Winnipeg today

The final wave started in the late 1980s and was smaller than any of the first three, with roughly 8,500 people and their families settling in Winnipeg, Yereniuk said.

Winnipeg's Ukrainian community is changing but remains vibrant, Yereniuk said. Recognizing that maintenance of the language is weaker than in decades past, the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education developed a Ukrainian bilingual program which educates 800 students in 11 schools across Manitoba, mostly in kindergarten through Grade 8.

"We are trying to maintain the linguistic base," Yereniuk said.

While fewer Ukrainian Manitobans speak the language, that does not mean they have lost interest in their roots, Yereniuk said. The opposite is true, as he has noticed an increase in the number of young Ukrainian Canadians seeking to learn about their ancestors.

"Many people in the first two waves lost contact with their families. Now younger people want to trace their family histories."

Fear caused many families to lose contact, Yereniuk said. Ukrainian Canadians feared their relatives would be punished by the Soviet rulers if they attempted contact. Those feelings began to abate in the 1960s when some began to send general letters and perhaps photographs.

*continued on p.5*



A family farm near Komarno, MB in 1920.

THE MICHAEL EWANCHUK PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, PC 96. U OF M ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS.