

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF UKRAINIAN HERITAGE



Seventh Street south of Hespeler Ave., 1890. Note 'wye' in tracks. Ogilvie's and McBean Bros. elevators, E. Winkler Lumber, Coblentz and Schultz & Hansen stores, two implement dealers, and bell-tower of second public school (built in 1892) in upper right of photo. P#888

entry, exit or even smuggling, d) *families and children*, e) *seasonal workers*, much needed in early spring and at harvest time. Farmhands or herdsman hired themselves out to build financial resources prior to establishing their own homesteads in Manitoba or moving on to Saskatchewan, Alberta or the United States, and f) *the indigenous people and Metis*. They used the north-south Jefferson Hwy., historically trading beaver pelts and other goods. They travelled by land (Post Road) and river. **Gretna** was definitely an amiable stopping point.

In 1891 Gretna's notable economic, political and social news was being reported in *The Gretna Star*, *Neche Chronotype* and *Der Northwestern*. The village amenities included a small train station and horse- buggy taxi service, post office, bank, Cobelantz General Store/outfitter, Customs Office, Northwest Mounted Police, hotels, quarantine station, saw mill, lumberyard, blacksmith, farm implement dealer, grain elevator, steam operated grist mill, legal, medical and midwife services, a school and church. Whether it was a planned social event or casual picnics, fishing, summer swims in the Pembina River or curling in winter it was a community that worked, socialized and worshipped together regardless of ethnic or religious background of its residents. **Gretna** provided the cradle of warmth and kinship much needed on a harsh prairie winter day to both local or visitor.

WasyI Eleniak, also known as the "Lemko Cowboy" worked for Jacob Dreuger (Kreuger?) and/or Heinrich Laiba (Loewen?) earning enough money to afford return passage to his village, Nebyliv in Galicia. He left **Gretna** in the spring of 1893. Having sold his possessions and finalizing passport arrangements (February 26, 1894) his brothers Petro and Iwan along with their families accompanied WasyI, his wife and three children in permanently leaving the borders of their past life and crossing over into a new future. They travelled through the cities of Stryj, Premysyl, Krakiv, Oswiecime, Berlin to Hamburg, Germany. They boarded S.S. Mongolian, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, docking at Quebec on June 25, 1894. Pressing on west by train via Winnipeg they once again re-established their presence in the **Gretna** region where all three families lived and worked. As proven cattlemen, herders or hired hands they each earned \$80.00-\$100.00 per year, 80 bushels of wheat and 40 bushels of rye, as well as the use of a small house. With the bountiful supply of river water, a soil made up of deep black loam, overlaying a clay subsoil and excellent drainage their families grew splendid vegetables and cared for livestock, dairy cows, chickens that supplied the basic necessities of milk, butter, cream, cheese and eggs for their children.

On November 10, 1894, a son, Iwan William was born into WasyI Eleniak's family in Gretna, Manitoba. (Registered in Manitoba Vital Statistics).*

While the Eleniak brothers dreamed of homesteading, they chose to remain close to the stable Mennonite community where they were able to save the much needed finances.

As more immigrants arrived to settle on Canada's prairie. **Dr. Joseph Oleskiw**, an agronomist from Lviv, Halychyna region initiated a personal tour of Canada in July, 1895 in order to assess and confirm the situation of early Ukrainians.

With letters of introduction from the High Commissioner in London, England, he met with representatives of the Canadian government in Ottawa to formulate a memorandum regarding the continuous immigration of Ukrainians to Canada. In Winnipeg, he met with the Commissioner of Dominion Lands and in Edmonton with the Minister of Internal Affairs. He was particularly impressed with the Red River soil which was "so rich, that even without fertilizing, it will produce good crops." This was the designated fertile belt discovered by Capt. John Palliser and Henry Hind during their exploration of Canada's interior in 1857-60. The optimism of The Pallister Triangle encouraged limitless visions of opportunity for new settlers and prosperity for entrepreneurs.



Joseph Oleskiw.

In August, 1895 Oleskiw visited known Ukrainian residents and homesteaders on the prairies and British Columbia. He also stopped at the prosperous Mennonite colony in Gretna, where he heard about the Ukrainian cowboy. In his memoirs WasyI agreed: "I suppose now you could call me a cowboy, as I herded their cattle."

Dr. Oleskiw's eloquent accounts of pioneering life in Canada were published in pamphlets, one entitled *O Emigratsiyi* (On Emigration), circulated in Western Galicia and Europe. It described open districts for homesteading, the requirements and process for registration of land, listed crops and their yields, use of machinery, marketing and the price of wheat. His encouraging reports opened the flood gates of immigration: "in a few years the farmer will build himself a good livelihood, although at present in the hardships of pioneering, ...his (the homesteader's) appearance does not harmonize with the free lands where he settled."

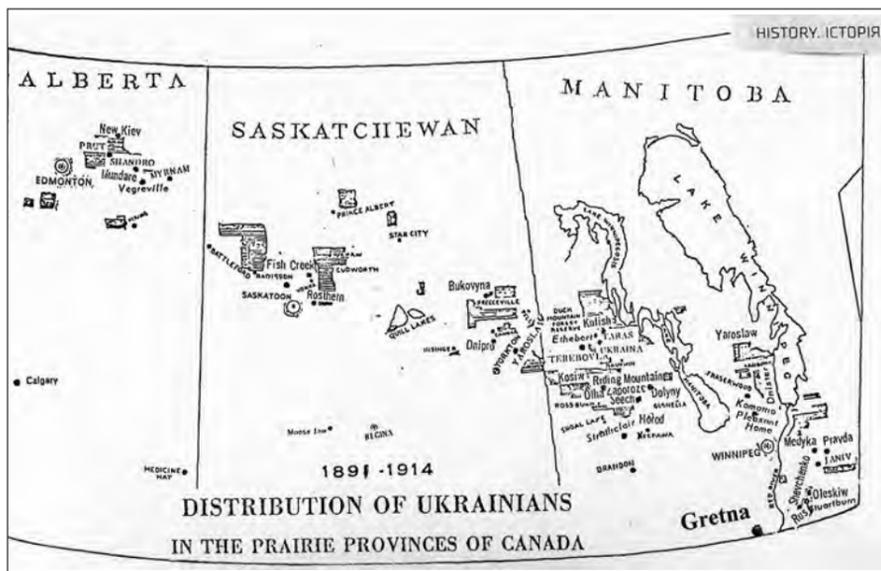
The Canadian government, upon Dr. J. Oleskiw's appeal accorded a Ukrainian immigration bureau in Winnipeg appointing **Cyril Genik**, an educator from Galicia as an immigration agent, making him the first Ukrainian civil servant in Canada who served in this capacity until 1911. Cyril Genik was multi-lingual and spoke Ukrainian, Polish, German and English. He arrived to Canada on the S.S Scicilia with his family. His role was to guide and monitor the group travel of 27 families and several single men to establish the first Ukrainian colony of Stuartburn, a short distance of 72 miles from Gretna. In his assignment as immigration agent, he continued to communicate with the Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton (Liberal MP), the Department, of Immigration and Dr. J. Oleskiw in Galicia. He served as interpreter, advisor and guide ensuring that illiterate homesteaders would not be swindled, legal land transactions met government regulations and that transportation by train or oxen were secured to distant homesteads. His family resided on Euclid Ave., Point Douglas area, in Winnipeg where he inaugurated the Taras Shevchenko Reading Society in 1903.



Cyril Genik.

As the continuous wave of Ukrainian immigrants from Galicia kept arriving at the C.P.R. station in Winnipeg they began to proliferate rural Manitoba. It is important to note that they were not necessarily assigned the best homestead lands. Some trekked swamps and trails with oxen or travelled by train to reach their destinations. Once there, they cleared bush land, built a basic temporary *zemlyanka* (mud hut) hired themselves out as season workers. The women/children learnt from the Aborigines how to dig Seneca roots which were sold for the much needed extra money to purchase the basics of life. The Canadian government offered neither financial assistance nor loans. Human tragedies were many. Some are recorded in the reports of the Northwest Mounted Police, others, are stored away in family memoirs or buried with pioneers in abandoned or unmarked graves.

to be continued



Threshing scene on Derk Harder farm, east of NeuAnlage, in 1896. Owner of threshing outfit was Abram Penner, Gretna.P#1061