by Maria Dunn

Shadow of the Rockies

Living in Alberta for 25 years, I have travelled in and through the stunning Canadian Rockies countless times. Only recently did I learn that some of the infrastructure that helps us enjoy the mountain parks was built by the forced labour of Ukrainian Canadian men interned during WWI. A few years earlier, Canada had actively encouraged these immigrants (often referred to as “Galicians”) as much-needed industrial workers, particularly in railway construction. However, in the face of war with the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1914, the government decided that these “enemy aliens”, now unemployed by the pre-war recession, were a potential menace to the community and should be detained in remote camps. Food, clothing and living conditions were poor, and on top of their expected work time, the internees often had to march many hours from the camp to their place of work.

This song takes its name from a book written by B.S. Kordan & P. Melnycky entitled In the Shadow of the Rockies: Diary of the Castle Mountain Internment Camp, 1915-1917.


I.

Young stranger,
as you walk these trails of beauty
And you feel the mountain air caress your face
As you stand in the shadow of the Rockies
Remember who toiled in this place
Please, remember who toiled in this place

II.

They courted our labour and called us to settle
The Great Canadian Plains
But how fickle the love of a fair young Alberta
For her “enemy aliens”

III.

Our invisible hands worked in nature’s cathedral
For the pleasure of tourist and town
Six days a week at slavery’s wages
Still we were not wanted around

IV.

In a camp the lay beneath Castle Mountain
Rotten food and sodden tents
The most glorious place in the world is ugly
When seen through a barbed wire fence

V.

Our footsteps and voices have long since faded
From these pristine forest paths
Yet many’s the mile and the hour we trudged here
To our place of labour and back

VI.

If you listen, young stranger, the wind in the pines
Or the water over the stones
You may hear the songs we sang to each other
To remind us of our homes

NOTES

1. The title of the song is taken from the title of the following book:

2. Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time of WWI. Ukrainians were often referred to as “Galicians” in the early 1900s in Canada.

Sources used for In the Shadow of the Rockies:
In the Shadow of the Rockies: Diary of the Castle Mountain Internment Camp, 1915-1917.


- description of his father’s (Bill’s) experiences in internment camps in BC and Ontario, 1915-19.
Chorus: Young stranger as you walk these trails of beauty and you feel the mountain air caress your face as you play in the shadow of the Rockies remember who toiled in this place Please, remember

Verse: They who courted our labor and called us nineteen to set up the great Can fourteen who hadn't a job or a trade and how sickle doubts the love of a fair young Al dalia for her enemy for he was a soon detained chorus: (Young)

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