

## Webinar Attendee Questions & Comments

from the 24 March 2026 Webinar

presented by  
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1. Can you please elaborate on how your research efforts have contributed and/or aligned with the Kingston Fort Henry Ukrainian Internment Exhibition and Plaque Dedication as profiled by Lubomyr Luciuk.

*In the Epilogue to 'No Place Like Home', I write about the importance of redress as a process for recovering the past – a necessary step if we are to reconcile with history and all that has occurred, including injustice. Plaquing internment sites, such as Fort Henry, erecting a statue at Castle Mountain, and constructing a permanent display and monument at Eaton, all aim to fulfill the goals that redress sets for itself – to acknowledge that, here, at this particular site, an injustice occurred. The work that I am committed to doing is to provide information about what occurred – for example, at Banff and Kapuskasing – and why it occurred – public opinion, the press, the tenuous legal status of enemy aliens in the country, etc. My work provides a context through which we are better able to understand the nature and depth of the injustice, and thus more fully appreciate why these sites are important.*

2. My grandfather was interned at a camp in Fernie. Was each of the internees photographed, and if so, where might one find these photos?

*Internment was a military operation. Rules regarding security prohibited the taking of photographs, accounting for their scarcity. That being said, photos of prisoners were randomly taken. These were usually group photos of the internees at work, troops, or camp facilities. Portrait shots of internees were extremely rare. (I know of only two.) Some of the general-view photos are deposited as collections in such places as the National Archives of Canada, the Glenbow Museum, and the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. A number have been posted online and can be easily found through a search engine.*

3. Were women and children also put in internment camps?

*Women and children were interned at the Spirit Lake camp in northern Quebec and the Vernon camp in BC. When a man with a family was interned, the family was allowed to accompany him into internment if they so wished. The idea was for these dependents not to fall into a state of absolute destitution. Many chose not to follow their menfolk into the camps, and so charitable institutions and churches, good Samaritans, provided such families with basic subsistence if their predicament was brought to their attention.*

4. Thank you for an excellent webinar! I am trying to find out if my great-grandfather, Joseph Bilinski (b.1888-1948) was detained in the Brandon or Fort Osborne camp. I believe he went to Banff, Castle Mountain (Roll Call #2338). Also trying to find out if he marched to Emerson. ... I'm wondering if potential unemployment/arrest/detainment is part of our family trauma. Thank you for any help you may be able to provide in attaining records.

*It would be difficult to answer the question regarding trauma and the unfortunate effect it may have had. All I can say is that despair and depression are often the result of trying and unhappy experiences. The stresses and pressure associated with internment could very well have contributed to the misfortune of your great-grandfather.*

*Internment Directorate files that included the personal details of internees were deposited with the Justice Department (which was in charge of internment) at the end of the operation. These were then turned over in the 1950s to the National Archives of Canada (NAC). The policy that governs the NAC, following the country's privacy laws, is that the details of a person's private affairs are to be expunged from the public record. Hence, the purging of personnel files. Contrary to what is widely believed, the government was not 'hiding' information. Rather, the purging was done in 1952 as a pro-forma matter. Still, bits of information about specific individuals are scattered throughout departmental files: Militia, Justice, RCMP, Parks Branch, etc., but these are random and hard to locate. You stumble across personal stories as they appear in your search.*

5. Were the internment camps also used to hold 'ordinary' criminals'?

*No, internment camps did not hold 'ordinary' criminals. Internment was a war measure, and the camps were specifically designed to meet the emergency security needs of the government. Those engaged in 'ordinary' criminal activity were arrested, charged and convicted in a court of law. After sentencing, they were sent to a provincial lock-up or penitentiary.*

6. Were some 'enemy aliens' also sent to work in the Cape Breton coal mines?

*I am more acquainted with the internees laying track in Atlantic Canada and harvesting. Still, prisoners released on parole were assigned to work in various mines in Atlantic Canada. I am not sure about Cape Breton, but there were numerous reports about released internees being sent to the mine in Minto, New Brunswick. They were required to stay with the mine for the duration of the war and report regularly to local authorities.*

7. How much of a role did the media (radio, newspapers) play in generating public paranoia and fear of these "hostile" alien immigrants?

*The chapter on British Columbia details the role of the press in that province. The editorials by BC papers were especially vitriolic, and, therefore, the province may have been an outlier. But a causal reading of the press in other parts of the country would confirm that there was a high degree of nativism expressed by the press, usually couched in the language of patriotism.*

8. Why is the Government never forced to be publicly (legally) liable for these kinds of decisions? Without accountability, there is no reason to be more judicious / careful in the future!

*When the Ukrainian-Canadian community engaged in the process of redress, the consensus opinion was that restitution should be symbolic. The injustice was committed against specific people, almost all of whom had passed on. As a legal matter, who would be compensated and on what grounds, if the victims were gone? The community's position was to call not for an apology, which could only be extended to those who were directly wronged, but an acknowledgment that an injustice had been committed. After many years, the government finally conceded. In terms of symbolic restitution, the community's position was for a redress fund to be created to promote awareness around WWI internment, a fitting tribute to those who suffered. And this, too, the government has done. In moving on, we must learn from the past. This initiative helps the country do that.*

9. Why were women and children also interned in the Spirit Lake Internment Camp near Amos, Quebec?

*See answer to Question 3.*

10. You cite the US Administration more recently using force (through ICE) as an example of political force not unlike Internment. But didn't the Canadian Government essentially use public fear, questionable legal opinions and media propaganda to curtail the "Truckers' Convoy" (Internment = property seizures; freezing bank accounts, hyped trials over minor misdemeanors)?

*Respectfully, I disagree with your claim that "the Canadian Government essentially use[d] public fear, questionable legal opinions and media propaganda to curtail the 'Truckers' Convoy.'" I would agree, however, that the government was excessive in its use of the Emergencies Act to bring an end to the disturbances.*

*In the aftermath, the Public Inquiry did little to persuade that the action taken by the government was measured and appropriate. More to the point, the recent Judicial Review (three weeks ago), concluded that the specific actions of the government were unwarranted and unjustified. I agree with this assessment. I also agree with the other findings that found law enforcement had both the authority and ability to deal with misdemeanours such as public nuisance, obstruction, unlawful gatherings, and the like, as understood in the city's bylaws and as minor offences under the Criminal Code. Although convoy participants, for the most part, were engaged in unlawful activity (which law enforcement could have mitigated if properly managed), they were not a security threat.*

*Regarding WWI internment, those arrested were not a security threat. They were simply jobless, hungry and poor. They were arrested and interned because of who they were, not because of what they did. Likewise, in the US, resident aliens are detained because of who they are and not because of what they do.*

11. What was the name of the Greek Catholic priest who was interned, and why was he interned?

*I believe you are referring to Bishop Nikita Budka, who issued a pastoral letter before war's start that those among the faithful, having been called up as military reservists, should do their duty by returning home to the 'motherland.' However unfortunate the letter, the language he used was very much in line with general thinking at the time, which gave expression to patriotic feelings. In the weeks leading up to the war, hundreds – English, Germans, French, Italians, and others – heeded the call to arms from abroad. Newspapers in Canada were full of entreaties to return and not act cowardly. Budka, in this sense, was no exception. But he was a public figure and an enemy alien at that. Arrested, he would be released a few days later, after recognizing the error of his ways by retracting his letter and substituting another, calling on the faithful to follow now their new loyalty to Canada.*

*The matter appeared to have been concluded with the disavowal of his past views. In the middle of the war, however, at a time of mounting hysteria about the course of the war and talk of 'traitors in our midst,' Budka's name came up once more as an example of the perfidy and treachery of the enemy alien. A matter of personal defamation, Budka sued. In a court of law, Budka's case was made, and he won.*

*After WWI, Budka returned to Western Ukraine, where he faithfully served his people in an episcopal role during the difficult years of WWII. Arrested by the Soviets in 1947, he was sent to a labour camp in the northern taiga of Siberia, where he perished along with tens of thousands of other Ukrainian political prisoners. He has been canonized by the Catholic Church as a martyr of the faith.*