

DOCUMENTING ALBERTA'S EAST EUROPEAN IMMIGRANTS

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Reprinted from Alberta's Pioneers from Eastern Europe: Reminiscences
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The story of Alberta's immigration from Central and Eastern Europe is by and large a terra incognita. Although, according to Canadian Census figures of 1971, close to a quarter of the population of the Province of Alberta is of Central and Eastern European origin, the history of the people who, beginning with the 1870's, came from that part of the world is still to be written. True, the Ukrainian community has done much in the way of collecting documents and publishing data relating to its history but this, too, is far from completed. The project, undertaken within the framework of the Division of East European Studies, University of Alberta, to write a history of Alberta's immigrant communities from Central and Eastern Europe is therefore a pioneering venture.

As a start, work has begun on the histories of the following communities: the Czech and Slovak, the Polish, the Latvian, the Germans from Eastern Europe and the Romanian. Those engaged in the work of research know the languages of the area and are well acquainted with the history, the traditions, and the literature of these communities. The main objective of the work is to investigate all avenues of information, to collect materials, and to examine data in order to present a true picture of these immigrants' pattern of settlement, their contribution to the life of the Province, and to explain the reasons for leaving their native land, and the choice of Canada as their new homeland.

One source of information is quickly disappearing. The number of pioneers who came to Alberta at the turn of the century is getting smaller all the time. It was felt therefore that there was a certain urgency to reach these people and to record their stories. The present publication, Alberta's Pioneers from Eastern Europe: Reminiscences, is but a modest attempt to introduce some of the members of the pioneering generation of Albertans whose homes were in Central or Eastern Europe, and to recount their experiences. Since source material is scarce, oral history has to play a significant role in the work undertaken.

The accounts included were written on the basis of personal interviews conducted within the period from September to November 1976. The material is arranged in chronological order, taking in consideration the date of the immigrant's arrival in Canada. In translating and editing the transcripts of interviews, an attempt was made to preserve the style of those being interviewed and only minor corrections of grammar were made.

Two stories tell about the experiences of the Germans who came to Canada from the former Russian Empire. Alberta was one of the places chosen by them for it provided opportunities to start a new life. They established a number of settlements, and among the oldest were Stony Plain and Bruderheim. At the turn of the century, a small trickle of Romanian immigrants began arriving from Bukovina. At present,

there are close to 4,700 members of that community in Alberta. Also included are stories of immigrants belonging to the second wave of immigration, that of the inter-war period. While the Germans from Eastern Europe, the Polish pioneers and the Romanians came from what was, at that time, the Russian, the German and Austrian Empires, the members of the second wave arrived from the so-called succession states which emerged on the map of Europe following the Paris Peace Treaties of 1919. The reasons for their coming were somewhat different from those of the early settlers. They left not because of oppression and dissatisfaction with the political situation, but rather for economic and "seek new horizons" reasons.

It is hoped that this publication as well as those of a similar nature will lead to a better knowledge and understanding of the communities that make up the population of Alberta, and that they will serve as a stimulus for Albertans of Central and East European background to come forward with memoirs, diaries, old issues of community publications, church and organizational records, which would greatly facilitate the research and the writing of a history of the Central and East European immigration to Alberta.