



SUSK recalls the Canadian Train of Ukrainian Pioneers

Larissa Schieven – Project Director

One hundred and twenty years ago, Ukrainian pioneers arrived in Canada, with dreams of a better life for themselves and their families. After years of hardships, struggles and hard work, these brave Ukrainians made a home for themselves in Canada, and today, more than 1.2 millions Canadians have Ukrainian heritage.

This past summer, in celebration and recognition of the hard work and sacrifices of these first Ukrainian-Canadian pioneers, the Embassy of Ukraine in Canada launched the Historical Train of Ukrainian Pioneers, tracing the path of the first Ukrainian settlers, beginning in Halifax and ending in Edmonton.

Former Ambassador Ihor Ostash graciously donated 3 full-trip tickets to SUSK, the Ukrainian Canadian Students Union during the 53rd Annual National SUSK Congress in Ottawa. Four students, past and present SUSK executive members, had the opportunity and honour to take part in this once-in-a-lifetime experience, on segments of the trip.

Augustine Krawchenko, internal relations director, Nadia Demko, secretary, Marco Jacuta, former president and myself, Larissa Schieven, project director, took part in the trip that began on June 24th, 2011 and ended on July 7th, 2011. On the train trip, which stopped in Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and finally Edmonton, were politicians, Ukrainian community leaders, members of Canadian and Ukrainian media, as well as artists, performers and musicians. Passengers were encouraged to wear authentic Ukrainian costumes.

The SUSK participants are all extremely grateful to the Ukrainian embassy for the opportunity. On the Toronto to Winnipeg segment of the journey that I participated in, the scenery along the way was beautiful. Meeting and spending time with Ukrainian politicians, artists, musicians, journalists, as well as members of the Ukrainian-Canadian community was a wonderful way to pass the time. A number of the participants on the train created our very own “Ukrainiski Dim” aboard the train, complete with vyshutya, kobassa, horilka and Ukrainian decorations in one of the cabins.

Upon arriving in Winnipeg we were met by a group of musicians, members of the Ukrainian community, and greeted with the traditional bread and salt. It was wonderful to see so many members of the Ukrainian Canadian community out so early on a Saturday morning to welcome us to their hometown. We had the chance to tour Winnipeg, including the Oseredok museum, featuring Baba’s Trunk exhibit, and the Manitoba Legislative building on Saturday. This was followed by a public reception at the Leo Mol sculpture garden. On Saturday evening we were invited to a lovely dinner at the home of Mr. Leo Ledohowski, where we mingled with Ukrainian community members from Winnipeg. On Sunday morning we visited the first Ukrainian Catholic church in Western Canada in Stuartburn, the Gardenton Ukrainian museum, and St. Michael’s Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the oldest Ukrainian church in Western Canada. The rest of the participants departed for Saskatoon and Edmonton on Monday morning, while I unfortunately had to return to Toronto. All in all, the trip was an amazing experience that I feel truly lucky to have had the opportunity to participate in.



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Augustine and Marco had the opportunity to travel between Toronto and Edmonton by train. Upon boarding the train, we met past Ambassador Dr. Ihor Ostash, as well as other influential Ukrainians, such as Oles Donij (Member of Parliament in Ukraine) and Olexander Donalaieko (Consulate General of Ukraine), Marika Burmaka (Ukrainian Singer/ Songwriter), and Yaroslav Jus (winner of Ukraine's Got Talent).

Our Ukrainian Canadian heritage was celebrated in all of the host cities, and made each and every one of us proud to be a part of the rich history of Ukraine and Canada. One of the highlights of the trip was celebrating Canada Day on the train. It was a uniquely Canadian way of celebrating as we headed west. We sipped complimentary wine, ate cake, played Canadian trivia games and then spent the remainder of the day sitting in the Panorama Cart of the train singing Ukrainian folk songs to the beautiful sound of the bandura. We ended the night by singing both national anthems, under the star lit sky in the great open space of our country.

For Augustine, a memorable moment was being called up on stage at a banquet by the Ambassador. He called upon all the train delegates who together sang "This Land is Our Land" while he played the guitar. This became a tradition of the "pioneers" (as we were called) and we sang this song for all of the host cities.

Nadia joined the trip in Winnipeg, and continued on to Edmonton with Marco and Augustine. One of Nadia's most memorable moments was lunch with the Ukrainian Sisters of St. Joseph of Saskatoon at their beautiful garden shrine (erected to honour two modern day martyrs who served in a community outside of Lviv following WWII, when the Ukrainian Catholic Church was outlawed by the Communist regime) where the pioneers were welcomed with such warm hospitality, delicious food, and the beautiful singing voices of the sisters.

Nadia will never forget being a part of the pioneer "flash mob" at the train station in Saskatoon, right before boarding the train for the last stretch of the journey to Edmonton. Accompanied by Yaroslav Jus on the bandura, all of the pioneers joined together to sing a medley of our favourite Ukrainian songs (including everyone's favourite, "This Land is Our Land" in Ukrainian) while Kalyna, the youngest pioneer on the voyage, showed off her Ukrainian dance moves and brought in other children from the crowd to join her. After exciting the crowd with our vibrant music and dance, we boarded the train for a final time, and were once again greeted according to traditional Ukrainian customs in Edmonton even at the pioneerly hour of six o'clock in the morning.

At last, we spent our last few days visiting and discovering heritage sites in and near Edmonton – among them the Ukrainian Museum of Canada and St. Josaphat's Ukrainian Catholic Church. At our final destination, the Ukrainian Heritage Village outside of Edmonton, the pioneers were warmly greeted in a heritage house, complete with a traditional Ukrainian meal cooked on a wood burning stove.

We are all very thankful for the opportunity to have taken part in this once-in-a-lifetime experience and extend our sincerest thanks to Dr. Ostash, the Ukrainian Canadian Embassy and SUSK for allowing us to participate in the Canadian Train of Ukrainian Pioneers. We are proud to be Ukrainian, and proud to be Canadian. Even more so, we are proud to be Ukrainian-Canadian.



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Community leaders, Augustine, Larissa, and Dr. Ihor Ostash



Marco, Larissa, and Augustine help decorate



Nadia and Augustine visiting the the Ukrainian Sisters of St. Joseph of Saskatoon



Yaroslav Jus (far left) and SUSK members in Saskatoon

MORE PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE on the SUSK: Ukrainian Canadian Students' Union Facebook Page: <http://www.facebook.com/SUSKNational>

About SUSK

SUSK is a national student organization comprised of Ukrainian student organizations at post-secondary institutions across Canada. It was formed in 1953 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Unfortunately, it fell inactive in 2001. During the XXII Congress of Ukrainian Canadians SUSK was revived. SUSK's mandate is to "advocate concerns relevant to Ukrainian Canadian students".

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