



MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF
COMMUNISM
TRIBUTE TO LIBERTY



Newsletter

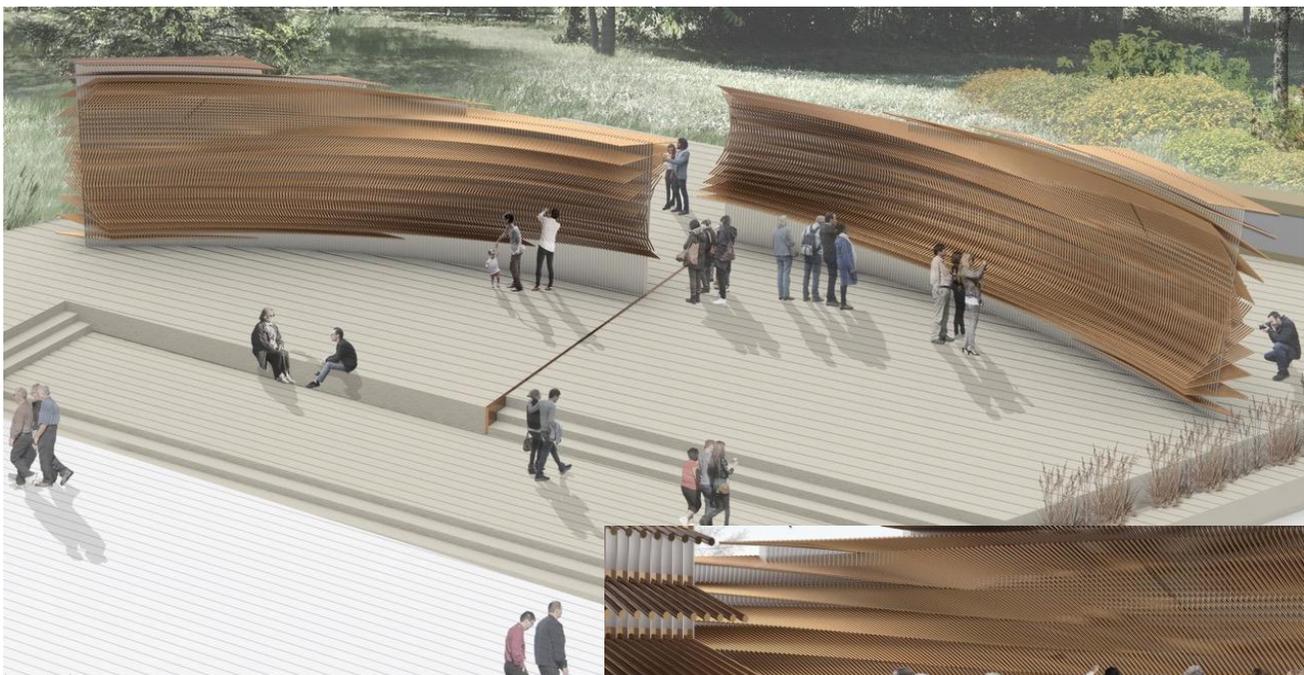
Fall 2020

Volume 12, Issue 4

Project Update

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has hampered progress on the construction of the Memorial. With so many different elements needing to come together for the construction to proceed it was inevitable that the pandemic would affect the project. However, Canadian Heritage, together with Tribute to Liberty and the National Capital Commission, is developing options on how to move forward with construction of the Memorial during the pandemic, made under the advisement of public health authorities.

In the meantime, here are several new renderings of the finished memorial.



Anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution

October 23, 2020, marks the 64th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 when thousands of protesters took to the streets demanding a more democratic political system and freedom from Soviet oppression. In response, Communist Party officials appointed Imre Nagy, a former premier who had been dismissed from the party for his criticisms of Stalinist policies, as the new premier. Nagy tried to restore peace and asked the Soviets to withdraw their troops. The Soviets did so, but Nagy then tried to push the Hungarian revolt forward by abolishing one-party rule.

On November 4, 1956, Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest to crush, once and for all, the national uprising. Vicious street fighting broke out, but the Soviets' great power ensured victory. At 5:20 a.m., Hungarian Prime Minister Imre Nagy announced the invasion to the nation in a grim, 35-second broadcast, declaring: "Our troops are fighting. The Government is in place." Within hours, though, Nagy sought asylum at the Yugoslav Embassy in Budapest. He was captured shortly thereafter and executed two years later. Nagy's former colleague and imminent replacement, János Kádár, who had been flown secretly from Moscow to the city of Szolnok, 60 miles southeast of the capital, prepared to take power with Moscow's backing.

Tribute to Liberty Chair Ludwik Klimkowski was honoured to participate in a flag raising ceremony at the City Hall in Ottawa (many thanks to HE Maria Vass-Salazar) to commemorate this important date in our resistance against communism and our oppressors. We were also humbled by the presence of a Canadian Hungarian (his commander of the Revolution card shown in pictures) who has a message for you: "Talk to your family members, your grandma, grandpa and preserve the memory of those who fought against communism".



History Unhidden **A Polish Story**

When I was growing up the everyday wonders and curiosity of childhood were eclipsed by the harsh realities of life. The ubiquitous secrets and lies of communism made my head spin, social problems prevailed, and empty stores were the rule, never the exception.

As the saying goes, it seems like only yesterday that the pervasive repression and economic and political struggles of the system became almost intolerable for so many of us.

My grandfather left Poland and went to France at 17, and became very active in the resistance during the Second World War. My grandmother was born in France, and my mother was eventually born there. Once Germany declared capitulation, my grandfather decided to take his wife and daughter back to his home country. In 1948 they returned to Poland and were the last group of Poles returning from France after the war. However, once he returned, my grandfather immediately regretted it.

My mother was almost 18 when she arrived in Poland from France, and life was not easy for her there. For three years she struggled to adjust to life, learning the language and trying her best to fit in—but everything seemed to be amiss. Eventually she married, and I was born in 1952.



(Mamka and me)

In 1957, my mother (or “Mamka” as I called her) went to visit her uncle in England. She attempted to stay, to get away from the hardship and oppression, and her plan was for me to follow soon after. Mamka remained in England, eventually remarrying, and her new husband adopted me. She tried, in vain, to get me over to England for six long years. In 1963, my

grandmother passed away, so Mamka was able to come back to Poland on a visa to attend the funeral. When she tried to go back to England, she was forbidden to leave the country and was forced to stay in Poland for five more years.

Times were very hard for all of us. Food was scarce. We had very little to put on the table as, at that time, the production of food was going to the USSR.

I remember my aunt waking me to go with her to the butcher at 4 in the morning, to try to get a ration of meat. When we arrived, there was already a line-up that wound around the block. I went to the front of the shop and saw that the store was empty—only a solitary cow’s head hanging in the window. I asked my aunt, “Why are we lining up? There’s nothing in there!” She replied that we should still wait so that we might “get a piece of the cow’s head and we can make something out of it.”

Many times I would come home from school hungry, and be told there would be a potato or some cabbage—or often just a single slice of bread—for dinner. And there were times when we were lucky to have that. I didn’t know what a banana or an orange was, let alone most foods, until much later in life when I left Poland to live in England.

When I was very young, my mother worked at a health clinic for children, but many people also knew she could speak and write French. They would often ask her to write to the French government to obtain their pension or for other official reasons. On one such occasion she was offered a very unusual form of payment. “I have only one egg to give you if you would help me,” the man told her. She agreed, and my mother and aunt proceeded to make pasta with that prized egg—a very rare treat.

At school, the literature was besieged with Stalin propaganda. Referred to by my teachers as “the father of the nation,” I would come home and regurgitate what I had learned about “our father,” proclaiming the details of his “wonderful works.” I would echo, “Our father Stalin, is giving us everything! We have everything we need.” My uncle, who had been part of the underground during the war would say, “No my child. We have another story. But that story may never leave this house.”

And so I existed on two sides of one coin, wrestling with two sets of historical facts. I was conflicted and utterly dismayed.

When my stepfather died in 1968, Mamka was finally able to go back to England to settle his estate and get away from the clutches of the system. Once again she worked to get me away from Poland's ongoing woes. Eventually she was successful, and when I arrived in England we were happily reunited. However, in time I left to attend school and to accept various career opportunities. For most of our lives, my mother was in one country and I was in another.

I read everything I could get my hands on that was more moderate, and finally understood the truth. The reality of the deceit I was force-fed in school was clear, and that affected me significantly. And I resented the fact that the lies of communism had robbed my mother and me of so many years together.

The communist system also embittered Mamka, and I was determined to give her a better life. When I moved to Canada it took me ten years, but I was ultimately able to bring her here. Mother and daughter were finally reunited, and it was wonderful. We took care of each other, worked on creative projects and spent holidays as a family. My dear Mamka passed away in 2016.

While I am very grateful for the last years we had together I still experience a sense of loss—not only for Mamka but also for the loss of the most significant and formative years of my life.

Submitted by Jacqueline Dunal

History Unhidden **Abram Wiebe's Story**

I was born in Canada in 1943 and have never met my uncle Abram Wiebe. As a youngster, I heard about him frequently from my mother when she would tell me stories about her early life in Russia (now Ukraine). When I visited relatives, they would often look at me and comment on how much I looked like Uncle Abram. As a youngster I would probably roll my eyes and wish they would talk about something else. However, something stayed with me and my Uncle Abram became part of my life and my memory.

Abram Wiebe was born 11 January 1897 in Lichtenau (now Svyetlodosolinskoje Ukraine). This is one of the Mennonite villages in the Molotschna settlement. Abram and his brother Nickolas remained in Russia in

the fall of 1928 when his parents and 4 sisters (one of whom became my mother) emigrated to Canada. The brothers were denied exit visas as they were still of military age and potentially eligible for the draft.

Details of his early life are sketchy. It is believed that he attended the School of Commerce (Kommerz Schule) in Halbstadt (now Molochansk Ukraine) as he worked as an accountant later in life. During World War I, he most likely worked in the Medical Corp. During the civil war he fought in the White Army under General Wrangel. On one occasion he came home on leave and in full White Army uniform walked into Lichtenau unaware that the village was occupied by the Red Army. His mother almost fainted when she saw her son standing in the doorway. He had not been seen by the Red Army even though soldiers were billeted in the front two rooms of his parents' house. He spent four days hiding under a bed (some accounts say between the mattresses) in one of the backrooms of the house before he was able to slip away under cover of darkness.



(Abram and Eugenie are on the LH side of photo)

Abram Wiebe married a widow, Eugenie Schulz (nee Schweier) in the mid 1920's. Eugenie, of Lutheran background, came from one of the German colonist settlements west of the Molotschna River. She had one daughter from her previous marriage by the name of Elfie. Abram and Eugenie Wiebe never had children of their own.

Abram Wiebe and his family received financial support from his sisters in Canada during the Ukraine famine (Holodomor) of the early 1930's. This enabled him to buy food and allowed his family to survive that catastrophe. The receipt of this assistance had the unfortunate consequence of attracting some unwanted attention. A man by the name of Pbgan (pronounced "Begun" with the accent on the second

syllable) made some threats to Abram and forced him to provide the address of his sisters in Canada. Pbgan subsequently sent a letter to Canada demanding financial assistance for himself. He was known to the Wiebe family from the time of the revolution as he was directly responsible for the death of Aaron Wiebe, Abram's cousin. Pbgan had played an important role for the Communists in the Molotschna area during the revolution but must have fallen out of favour by the 1930's. Consequently, the Wiebe family remembered Pbgan when his threatening letter reached them in Canada. On the advice of Abram Wiebe, the sisters in Canada did not send any assistance to Pbgan.

The Abram Wiebe family was living in Tokmak in 1937 when he was arrested by the Communist authorities. In the weeks preceding the arrest, Abram had grown increasingly apprehensive as many friends and acquaintances were being arrested. In his last evening at home, he had complained of a tooth ache and talked about seeing a dentist the next day. The arrest followed the usual procedure, starting with a loud knock on the door during the night. The house was searched and the arresting authorities found pictures and letters from his father and sisters in Canada. This was considered to be incriminating evidence. He was taken away after a false promise from the authorities that he would be returned in the morning. His step-daughter vividly remembers the fearful look on his face as he was taken away.

Elfie and her mother were allowed to visit Abram several days after his arrest. He was being held in a jail in Halbstadt. It appeared that he had been beaten. In order for the guards to listen in on their conversation, they insisted that everyone speak Russian. Elfie stubbornly spoke in German and her step-father had to implore her to speak Russian as he told her that he would suffer the consequences if she did not comply. Abram's wife came to visit him again a few days later and discovered that he had been sent into exile.



(Abram on the right with his brother circa 1933)

From what we can gather, Abram Wiebe was sent to a place where he worked in forestry. He wrote several letters home to his wife. His last letter stated that he had had an accident when a fully loaded wagon had run over his leg. The leg was broken and he was unable to work. The last sentence in the letter stated that "As you know, those who don't work can't eat".

There is an unusual follow-up to this story. Sometime in the 1960s, our family heard a third-hand account from someone who had been exiled to a forestry camp in the Soviet Union and had survived and subsequently come to Canada. This source stated that during a move from one camp to another he saw a man sitting on the ground leaning against a tree. Something seemed amiss and as he approached the man it became apparent that he was dead and the body was frozen. A search of the body revealed some identification—it said "Abram Wiebe - Halbstadt". There is no way of confirming the story or determining that this Abram Wiebe was indeed my uncle.



Starting in 2011, I have had the opportunity of spending time in Halbstadt (Molochansk) and volunteering at the Mennonite Centre, which provides humanitarian assistance to the areas where my ancestors once lived. This has given me the opportunity to visit the places where my uncle once lived. I have visited his home in Lichtenau where he was born and stopped and stared at the jail in Halbstadt where he was held after his arrest. I know that his remains are scattered somewhere in the forests of Siberia. The brick in the Tribute to Liberty wall is his only memorial.

Submitted by Alvin Suderman