

# FESTIVAL OF FALSEHOODS


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By Marsha Skrypuch, Ontario, 5 February 2014

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**MARSHA SKRYPUCH:** This is incorrect. There was one person from the Ottoman Empire interned at Banff: J. Camillebeck--an Assyrian, not an ethnic Turk. Assyrians were persecuted by the Ottoman government and the Young Turk government. (Source: Roll Call can be downloaded and searched at <http://uccla.ca/sources.htm> )


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**MS:** There was no such empire as the Turkish Empire in WWI. There was an Ottoman Empire.

"were subject to internment. Of 8,579 men at 24 camps across Canada, 5,954 were of Austro-Hungarian origin, including 5,000 Ukrainians; 2009 were Germans, 205 were Turks.

**MS:** My count is actually 135 from the Ottoman Empire, but this does not make them ethnic Turks. Virtually all of those interned who came to Canada from the Ottoman Empire were from persecuted minority groups--mostly Alevi Kurds, although there were some Assyrians and a few Armenians.

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"and 99 were Bulgarians. All endured hunger and forced labor, helping to build some of Canada's best-known landmarks such as the Banff National Park, according to the Canadian Encyclopedia."

**MS:** Those who were interned from cities were already enduring hunger. Those who had stayed in the Ottoman Empire would likely have died not only because of the war but because the Young Turk triumvirate had decided upon the destruction of citizens who were not ethnic Turks.

"These Turks"

**MS:** They were not Turks. They were immigrants from the Ottoman Empire.

"used to live in Bradford."

**MS:** Brantford in Ontario.

"All 200"

**MS:** The correct overall figure is 135, but not all of them lived in Brantford. Approximately 100 lived in Brantford.

"or so were picked up one night"

**MS:** Arrested because of an unfounded rumor that they had tried to blow up the local post office in an act of treason. This assertion was soon dropped. Those who had citizenship papers were let go. Those who didn't were interned. They were fed and likely ate better than they had in months. Residents from enemy countries who had not become naturalized Canadians were subject to restrictions in time of war. Some were interned while others had to report regularly to the local authorities. Those who were interned did do hard labour but were credited 25 cents a day, which could be redeemed at the camp store. They were fed and housed.

"and sent to a camp north of Ontario."

**MS:** The camp was not north of Ontario. It was in Northern Ontario--Kapusksasing, Ontario.

"They spent five years there."

**MS:** Most spent less than two years. Many were paroled and worked in factories, some in the St. Catharines area of Southern Ontario, near Brantford.

"Some died there."

**MS:** One Ottoman internee died while in Kapuskasing, Ontario. His name was Alex Hassan, an Alevi Kurd, not an ethnic Turk.

"Others came back to Bradford."

**MS:** Brantford. There is also no documentation that any returned to Brantford.

"There is a burial site in the city where the bodies of some of those who came back are believed to be."

**MS:** This is inaccurate. In Mount Hope cemetery, close to the Armenian section, is a section where Alevi Kurds are buried. When comparing the names of people buried in this plot, there is no exact match to the names of known internees. There are three similar names but in all three cases, the names are classic Alevi Kurd names. In short: it would be a lie to claim that ethnic Turk internees are buried here.

"This year marks the centenary of the start of World War I. So the Turkish ambassador to Canada, just like his other Italian or German colleagues, decided to start an initiative to commemorate the Turks that suffered in the detention camps."

**MS:** Except that there is no documentation of any ethnic Turks who were interned in Canada.

"The response of the local municipality to the wish to mark the place with a plaque was positive at first, yet local authorities appear to be hesitating in backing this purely humanitarian initiative."

**MS:** If this were a humanitarian initiative the Turkish ambassador would have acknowledged the true ethnicity of these people. This is clearly a propaganda effort and it was recognized as such by local (Brantford) authorities.

"No doubt the Armenian community is behind it."

**MS:** While there is no documentation that ethnic Turks were interned, there is documentation of a few Armenians who were interned. For this reason it would be natural for the Armenian community to be interested in the subject.

I must point out that I am not Armenian. My heritage is Irish/French on my mother's side and Ukrainian on my father's side. My own Ukrainian grandfather was interned in WWI in Jasper Alberta. I find the ambassador's entire charade to be disrespectful of the memory and hardship that the true

internees were subjected to. I resent having my own grandfather's tragedy used as a political tool by the Turkish ambassador in his quest to deny the Armenian Genocide.

"They think this is an effort to derail their lobbying activities!"

**MS:** It is fairly clear that the ambassador wishes to label these non-Turks in order to use them as a propaganda tool.

"Turkish historian Taner Akçam, who claims that the World War I mass killings of Armenians by Ottoman hands was genocide, talks about a "denial industry" in Turkey. I would not contest it, except that the same is also true for the Armenian diaspora. Their industry is about closing all eyes and ears to anything that can question genocide."

**MS:** The writer is fabricating again. Since there is no documentation of Turks interned in Canada, it is the Turks who are shutting their eyes to the truth.

"But this industry goes as far as "obstructing anything Turks do; hating anything Turkish."

**MS:** This is incorrect. There are many stories passed down from survivors of the Genocide of Armenians about Turks who saved their Armenian neighbors from destruction, even risking their own lives to do so. Virtually every survivor heard of at least one of these noble Turks. Why can't the Turkish government acknowledge the Genocide of the past? People alive today did not commit it, but by this continual denial there can never be healing between Turks and Armenians. If the ambassador wants a 100th anniversary story to highlight Turkish history, let him focus on those brave and righteous Turks of the past who stood in the way of tyranny and saved their neighbors. Don't fabricate history. Contemporary Turks deserve to know the truth so the healing process can begin. And Armenians must have the sins perpetrated upon their ancestors acknowledged so that their healing can begin.

"Of course there are moderate Armenians looking for dialogue, but it seems they are being terrorized by the more radicals."

**MS:** It's not radical to stick to the truth.

"What's wrong with commemorating a few hundred Turks who had nothing to do with the Armenian tragedy in Anatolia?"

**MS:** What's wrong? They were not Turks. And there weren't a few hundred. There were approximately 135 Alevi Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians and other minorities who fled the Ottoman Empire for a better life in Canada who were then tragically caught up in war hysteria and interned as enemy aliens.

"It would have been much wiser to come and attend the ceremony and perhaps give messages or letters to the Turkish ambassador, asking the Turkish state to show the same sensitivity to the thousands of dead Armenians."

**MS:** Thousands? Try a million-and-a-half. What sort of sensitivity is the ambassador showing? Those interned had fled oppression in the Ottoman Empire. They were Ottoman citizens, but they were not ethnic Turks. They were Kurds, Alevis, Assyrians, and Armenians. Why can't the ambassador acknowledge this?

"Another example of the Armenian "industry": Apparently whenever Turkish representations donate books reflecting the Turkish side of what happened to the local libraries, Armenians take the books, destroy them, and then pay compensation."

The denial industry in Turkey is losing, albeit slowly,

**MS:** Thank goodness.

"its force; I wonder when this will be the case with the Armenian diaspora."

**MS:** The Armenian diaspora has amassed an impressive collection of primary documentation about the Genocide of Armenians. It is a pursuit for justice, with hard data to back it up.

"I wonder to what degree they are ready to realize that taboos are being broken in Turkey about the Armenian tragedy.

**MS:** The correct descriptive is Genocide.

"More and more people are questioning the past. It is imperative that the Armenian diaspora realizes this change in Turkey. Yet without any bridges for dialogue, how can we blame them for not being aware of current developments on the subject?"

**MS:** The ambassador could demonstrate this development by looking at the facts of WWI internment instead of spinning into propaganda.

"In contrast to the past, the Turkish government is very much willing to enter into a dialogue with the diaspora; in fact Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has called them the "Anatolian diaspora.

"But in view of the resistance that will emanate from the diaspora, countries that are hosting Armenian communities should help initiate this dialogue. After all, several countries, from Europe to the Americas, will come under extreme pressure from both Armenians and Turks in these two years ahead."

