

PLANS FOR 'TURKISH PLOT' PUT ON HOLD


Posted on August 10, 2013 by Keghart



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Heather Ibbotson, [Brantford Expositor](#), 29 August 2013

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"There are so many aggressive and very angry groups, and accusations and absolute misunderstandings of the situation," that the plan is now "officially on hold," Friel said Thursday.

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"We're backing away" until a response is received from the federal government and city council has an opportunity to review and discuss it, he said.

Friel said the plan had stirred up negative commentary "on an international level, far beyond what a municipality can handle."

The initial intent had been to mark an early Ontario Muslim burial plot while also telling the story of a 1914 roundup of about 100 so-called "enemy aliens" during the First World War.

However, the linking of the two became the subject of sharp criticism among Armenian communities in Canada and abroad as being misleading, inaccurate and kowtowing to the political agenda of Turkish government officials.

Friel said Thursday he was surprised by the reaction and that the proposal was "being used by some to try to promote issues that are valid but have zero relationship to what is happening here.

"I don't know what the real history is any more," Friel said.

Brant MP Phil McColeman said he is aware of the "very unusual situation" and has brought it to the attention of his federal counterparts.

"It's a complicated issue. There is a lot to sort out," he said, adding government ministers are currently swamped trying to get acquainted with many files and issues relating to new portfolios.

At issue is a small plot created in 1912 in the northeast section of Mount Hope cemetery. For years it was referred to as the Turkish Plot, although the majority of the 16 people buried there appear to be

Alevi and not ethnic Turks, according to local researcher Bill Darfler.

McColeman said it was important not to misrepresent someone as being something they were not. However, he also said the decision on marking the plot does not seem to be a federal government decision, but rather the city's decision.

The story is complicated by a November 1914 incident that occurred days after the declaration of war between Great Britain and Turkey. City police, acting on orders from Ottawa, detained all local "Turks." Some 100 men were rounded up, briefly held at the jail, then at the armories and then transported by train out of the city, eventually ending up at an internment camp in Kapuskasing.

It cannot be proven that any of the 16 people buried in the Brantford plot were among those detained during the First World War. In fact, seven of the men are certain to have no connection as they died prior to the 1914 incident. It is also believed that many, if not most, of the "Turks" rounded up were actually Alevi.

Concerns were aroused after it became known that Turkish consul general Ali Riza Guney had toured the cemetery site, called on Friel and expressed interest in the erection of a monument.

Guney was in Brantford again for recent celebrations at the end of Ramadan at the local mosque, as were McColeman and Friel. McColeman said the Turkish official appeared "eager to proceed" with the proposed plan for a plaque.

Friel said Thursday that Guney indicated he would back away from the issue if it was causing difficulty.

During the summer, the proposal to erect a plaque caught the attention of overseas media and has been the subject of commentary in Turkey.

It also raised the ire of the Canadian-Armenian community as well as those further abroad who view the Turkish government's interest in a quiet corner of a Brantford cemetery as being a politically motivated gesture with ulterior motives.

A plaque or monument "identifying (those buried in the plot) with Turkey and the Turkish government would be an injustice," said Toronto resident Sam Manougian, a member of the Armenian National Committee of southern Ontario.

The idea of a monument endorsed by the Turkish government that incorrectly labels Alevi as though they were Turks is a "real injustice," he said.

The website Keghart.com has been monitoring the situation, and any articles relating to it. [An online petition](#) to "Stop the Fake Monument" had collected 342 signatures by Thursday.

Visit [PETITION - Stop the Fake Monument](#)

