

“Kapuskasing/Internment Camps Prove Great Value”

On January 14, 1915, the *Fort William Daily Times Journal* published one of the first articles describing what life would be like at an internment camp for ‘enemy aliens.’ Written in a tone that made the internment camps sound like an advantageous place for the internees, the article speaks about a camp in the Abitibi district of Quebec. It states that a large colony of Austrians is being established in the Abitibi region, and that after clearing the land, it is likely that a town centre and other such buildings will be erected.ⁱ A few days later, the *Fort William Daily Times* also reported news from parliament buildings regarding the five hundred newly arrived prisoners of war/‘enemy aliens’ to Kapuskasing, between Cochrane and Hearst.ⁱⁱ The article says that, “the men are under military surveillance, and are housed in a series of comfortable log cabins. They are paid at the rate of twenty-five cents per day.”ⁱⁱⁱ

By May 5, 1915, the *Port Arthur Daily News* had reported that the first group of 100 ‘aliens’ had left for Kapuskasing.^{iv} Just over twenty days later, the *Port Arthur Daily News* published an article with the headline, “Internment Camps to Prove of Great Value.”^v This article tells of the situation at internment camps using information received by the camp commandants. The camps being described in the article, Spirit Lake and Kapuskasing, are described as being like Austrian villages.^{vi} The article continues by saying that most internees will receive their own plot of land once the war is over and that at both camps, all of the seeds and tools required are being supplied.^{vii} Families are apparently being kept together which each family living in a small cottage whereas the unmarried people would reside in large huts capable of holding around 105 people.^{viii} It is also stated that all of the people are supplied with blankets, clothing and “plenty of good food.”^{ix}

By July 15, 1915, with a report of more ‘aliens’ being sent to Kapuskasing, the *Port Arthur Daily News* reinforced the idea that the internment camp was a nice place. It states that “life is made quite comfortable for the interns who are being taken care of under the terms of

The Hague treaty.”^x The article also speaks about the living conditions of the interns residing at Kapuskasing: “Good, large, comfortable camps have been erected for the men and while they are kept at work, the labor is not heavy and the food is wholesome and good.”^{xi} The land that the ‘aliens’ had been clearing was also reported as fruitful as they have been already harvesting vegetables that are being used in the cook houses.^{xii} The article ends by noting that many of the ‘aliens’ are “better off” since they arrived that their circumstances are certainly better than if they were left to their own resources during this time.^{xiii}

Another article published on January 27, 1916, gives details about life at the Kapuskasing internment camp. In a response to rumours and wild stories circulating about “men being eaten by wolves” Lieutenant Colonel F.F. Clarke let it be known that no such events have taken place, even claiming that wolves are not present in the part of the country.^{xiv} Lieutenant Colonel Clarke continues to explain exactly where Kapuskasing is and the types of labour that the ‘enemy aliens’ are being utilized for. According to Clarke, Kapuskasing, located on the Kapuskasing river south of James Bay, is the largest camp of its kind in Canada with a population of about 1400 ‘aliens’ who are mostly of Austrian descent.^{xv} They are employed in the clearing of land for experimental farms, the building of colonization roads, and the erection of buildings.^{xvi} Clarke also tells the *Daily News* that the district is now being organised for the future; having a public school section and a post office.^{xvii} The last section of the article also quells rumours about trouble at the camp. Lieutenant Colonel Clarke maintains throughout the article that no trouble such as riots, organized strikes, or anything has occurred at Kapuskasing.^{xviii}

References

- “100 Aliens Taken To Internment Camp At Kapuskasing.” *Port Arthur Daily News*, 5 May, 1915.
- “Aliens Now At Work on Experimental Farm.” *Fort William Daily Times Journal*, 28 January, 1915.

"How Life Goes In Internment Camp At Kapuskasing." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 27 January, 1916.

"Interned Aliens May Establish a Farming Settlement in Quebec." *Fort William Daily Times Journal*, 14 January, 1915

"Internment Camp is a Fine Place." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 15 July, 1915.

"Internment Camps to Prove of Great Value." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 26 May, 1915.

ⁱ "Interned Aliens May Establish a Farming Settlement in Quebec." *Fort William Daily Times Journal*, 14 January, 1915

ⁱⁱ "Aliens Now At Work on Experimental Farm." *Fort William Daily Times Journal*, 28 January, 1915.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} "100 Aliens Taken To Internment Camp At Kapuskasing." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 5 May, 1915.

^v "Internment Camps to Prove of Great Value." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 26 May, 1915.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} Ibid.

^x "Internment Camp is a Fine Place." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 15 July, 1915.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} "How Life Goes In Internment Camp At Kapuskasing." *Port Arthur Daily News*, 27 January, 1916.

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} Ibid.

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Ibid.

INTERNEED ALIENS MAY ESTABLISH A FARMING SETTLEMENT IN QUEBEC

OTTAWA, Jan., 14.—The establishment of a large Austrian colony in the Abitibi district of Quebec and the removal of these people from the more populous centers is likely to follow the clearing of the land to which work hundred of these aliens are being assigned. It is proposed to clear a town site and put the people on the agricultural lands which surround it. Several Montreal Austrians are interested in the project. Aid for the erection of necessary buildings would likely be sought in that province, as in as much as it be the benefit of any settlements which are established.

HOW LIFE GOES IN INTERNMENT CAMP AT KAPUSKASING

DESCRIPTION IS GIVEN BY COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE CAMP TO WHICH LOCAL ALIENS WERE SENT

WORK DONE BY 1400 INTERNS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF LT.-COL. CLARKE WILL BE A GREAT ASSET

Toronto, Jan. 26—Lieut.-Col. F. F. Clarke, commanding officer of the 127th battalion, just newly arrived back from the internment camp at Kapuskasing, had many interesting things to speak about when questioned concerning his experiences in the camp. He declared at the start that the many wild stories in various papers as to men being eaten by wolves were absolutely untrue, as there is not a single wolf in that part of the country.

Kapuskasing camp is situated on the Kapuskasing river, south of James' Bay, and is the largest of its kind in Canada. There are now about 1400 aliens interned there, yet there is not a single German amongst them. There are a few Turks, but the majority are Austrians, and the work they are employed on is the building of colonization roads and clearing of land for experimental farms for the Dominion Government. It was this part of the work that the colonel waxed enthusiastic over.

Will Be Great Asset

"The work the prisoners are doing is going to be the greatest asset that the Ontario Colonization Department ever received," he declared, and went on to explain the principle on which the work is being carried out. "They are clearing the land so that settlers can start with the crops, and an attempt has been made to clear about twenty-five acres on each lot, fronting the roads that are being built, and small settlers' houses are being put up in order first to accommodate the men who are building the roads and, secondly, they are being left in good condition for the settler when he arrives.

"The district, which only just over a year ago was nothing but thick bush with a small clearing of no more than an acre, has now been organized into a public school section, and is also being allotted a post office. Though it was nothing but bush when I went there, there are now about 122 buildings erected, which, leaving out Sundays and an odd day or so when we could not work, means a building erected every two days," said the colonel.

No Trouble

He stated that there had been no trouble with the prisoners and he had never occasion to once call out the troops. About thirty or forty of them have been released on parole, in cases where a bond has been put up. One thing the colonel emphatically stated was that not once has there been an organized strike, and he put this down to the fact that every reasonable complaint had been carefully investigated. The prisoners, who are organized into companies of one hundred each, are housed in camps made out of lumber and covered with weatherproof building paper, all the work being done by themselves. The actual camp only covers about twenty acres, that is, the buildings, etc., but the total area is now about 600 acres, and by next midsummer will be in the neighborhood of 1000 acres.


No trouble has been experienced in obtaining supplies, as these are all bought by the War Commission at Ottawa, and the Transcontinental Railway runs right through the centre of the camp. No trouble has been experienced in obtaining fresh water, as the river also runs through the camp.

The new officer in charge of the camp is Lieut.-Col. Royce, of the Queen's Own.

ALIENS NOW AT WORK ON EXPERIMENTAL FARM

TORONTO, Jan. 28.—According to reports received at the parliament buildings, there are now over 500 prisoners of war, principally Austrians, engaged in clearing the site for the new Dominion experimental farm in northern Ontario, between Cochrane and Hearst.

The men are under military surveillance, and are housed in a series of comfortable log cabins. They are paid at the rate of twenty-five cents per day.



100 ALIENS TAKEN TO INTERMENT CAMP AT KAPUSKASING

**FIRST PARTY FROM TWO CITIES
LEFT LAST EVENING IN
CHARGE OF CAPTAIN RUTTAN
—RATHER LONG TRIP**

One hundred unnaturalized Austrians left the city last night under Captain H. A. Ruttan and a guard of twenty men from the Ninety-Sixth regiment for the internment camp at Kapuskasing. There were fifty from Port Arthur and the remainder from Port William, and all were single men of military age.

At Port Arthur the first batch assembled at the armories, having been instructed to do so by Mr. A. L. McEwan, registrar of aliens. They seemed to be well pleased of their position, and they joked with the large crowd of fellow countrymen which assembled at the armories and station to give them a send off.

They marched to the station and entrained in special cars, already occupied by the Port William men. They will go via the Algoma Central line to Hearst and thence by T. C. R. to their destination, after which Captain Ruttan and his command will return.

There are still eight hundred eligible for internment in Port Arthur but it is very improbable that the married men will be sent unless some arrangement is made to take care of their wives and children. The married men have been crying for work but since the opening of navigation there has been less call for such.

It is likely that the remainder of the aliens will be shipped to the internment camps in batches of one hundred each week.

Internment Camps to Prove of Great Value

Austrians Learn to Farm and will go on the Land when War is Over—Local Interns are Anxious To Go.

After the war is over Canada will have hundreds of agriculturalists who will develop every acre of arable land, according to Captain Lambkin, of Ottawa, chief officer of transportation of aliens, under General Sir William Otter, who is at present in Port Arthur to superintend the removal of 150 Austrians from Fort William and Port Arthur tonight to Kapuskasing camp.

Captain Lambkin stated to The Daily News today that the Austrians at Spirit Lake, Quebec, and Kapuskasing, Ontario, have each got plots to cultivate, and when war is over, those Austrians will turn to the land. At both camps seeds are supplied to the prisoners, and every spare minute they have is diverted to their plots.

Like an Austrian Village

At Spirit Lake there are about nine hundred Austrians, amongst them being twenty families. The internment camp is like an Austrian village, there being a street lined with cottages with gardens at front and back. Lieut.-Col. Rodden is in command of the camp, and no complaints have been received. Unmarried Austrians reside in large huts capable of holding 105 persons, and they are supplied with blankets, clothing and plenty of good food. The

prisoners prepare their own food and bake their own bread, a bake shop having been established.

At Kapuskasing, where the Port Arthur and Fort William aliens are being taken, the conditions are much the same. The prisoners are highly elated with their surroundings, and no complaint of any kind has been received by Major Clark, who is in command of the camp. Captain McEwan, alien registrar in Port Arthur, has been bombarded with Austrians wanting to go to Kapuskasing urging them to try to get with the next contingent as they are having a lovely time.

One Smuggled In

When the first squad arrived at Kapuskasing, it was found there were 101 instead of 100. It was later found that a local Austrian had smuggled himself among the chosen so anxious was he to get away.

Captain Lambkin stated he had heard nothing of aliens to be interned at either Upsala or Conmee, as was the result of the conference between Mayor Mooney and Premier Hearst. He did not know when more Austrians would leave Port Arthur, as General Otter did not want to burden the camp commanders with them if there was not proper accommodation.

INTERNMENT CAMP IS A FINE PLACE

**LIFE IS MADE COMFORTABLE
FOR THE ALIENS—ANOTHER
PARTY TAKEN FROM TWO
CITIES LAST NIGHT**

A party of one hundred aliens, nearly all of whom were Austrians, left last night over the C. P. R. for the government internment camp at Kapuskasing where they will be interned for the duration of the war.

The party from here was under a guard of the Ninety-sixth regiment with Captain Lambkin, assistant to General Sir William Otter supervising. Another party from the Soo will be received at Franz.

Reports from the internment camp are that the life is made quite comfortable for the interns who are being taken care of under the terms of The Hague treaty. Good, large, comfortable camps have been erected for the men and while they are kept at work the labor is not heavy and the food is wholesome and good. Land was cleared this spring and considerable of it cultivated. The vegetables are now being used in the cook house and much appreciated by the aliens. Many of them are better off there than they have been since coming to this country and certainly in more comfortable circumstances than if left to their own resources at this time.
