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A Tribute to Isidore Goresky

July 8, 1978 saw the first of the school reunions in the area. Students who attended the "red brick school" in Smoky Lake from 1926 to 1936 sat down for a reunion dinner at the Smoky Lake complex amongst friends they hadn't seen for 45 years.

Over 160 guests arrived, some from the States, east coast, and west coast. They came to see their friends and honor their old principal Isidore Goresky. They gave him a brick from the old school, a set of paintings of the old school and a unique collection of their memories of school days called "Ring the Bell". It was a great reunion and included, fittingly enough, a chance to ring the original bell.

The organizing committee, after paying the bills, had donations left over. They've gathered interest in the bank and now a decade later, on Tuesday, December 6th, the remaining former students of the red brick school in Smoky Lake met in the Smoky Lake Museum to present Natalie Goresky Lupul, Isidore's daughter, with a plaque commemorating Mr. Goresky's life time of service. The plaque will remain in the museum, a cheque for the rest of the donations with compounded interest totally \$1255 was presented for the museum to Heritage Society Chairman Nick Homeniuk, by former student Senator Martha Beilish. Senator Bielish said that she was glad Natalka Lupul of Edmonton could come to witness the ceremony. Isidore Goresky, now 86 is living with his wife in White Rock, B.C. having moved two years ago from Edmonton.

If it wasn't for your father, said Senator Bielish, many of us would not have reached the heights we have come to. He was a teacher, a humanitarian and a historian for the Ukrainian people. He helped those of us in the school to look ahead and realize there are opportunities for us. It was not easy for those born on homesteads to see that far ahead. There was no television to show us the rest of the world. Mr. Goresky was a member of the legislature. Through him we got to go to the legislature. That didn't happen very often.

I remember, said Senator Bielish, the days when only those from the Smoky Lake School District could attend the high school without paying a tuition fee. During the depression years we who lived outside the district had to pay a fee of \$35.00 per year. I remember the day they said that if you weren't paid by such and such a date you couldn't come to school.

Her dad said they could wait. He was busy cutting hay. But the trustees did arrive at the classroom and to the embarrassment of the students asked those who had not paid to gather up their books and leave. My pride was hurt, said Senator Bielsih and I told my parents I wouldn't go back. That evening Isidore Goresky rented a car, he didn't own one, and came to the home of all the children saying that he knew they should pay, asking them to give anything they could at the time so the kids could go back to school tomorrow. We all came back and somehow the money was paid. If it

wasn't for him some of us may not have gone through highschool.

Mr. Bielish, my husband's father, was on the school board and I often reminded him of that day, but he laughed and said it was serious business and so it was, said the senator.

Natalka thanked the senator for the beautiful plaque. As a historian her father would appreciate his picture and the history of his career engraved on the plaque. My father doesn't like today's tombstones, because all they say is when a person's born and when they died. He likes a little history on it and now here it is, said his daughter. I will make sure, said Natalka that my parents visit here again this summer.

Although Isidore's eye sight is failing he still reads with the use of a magnifying glass. On the plaque he will be able to read "Principal of Smoky Lake School 3880 from 1926 to 1935. Alberta Member of the Legislative Assembly, United Farmers of Alberta from 1930 - 1935. Rector of M. H. Ukrainian Institute from 1935 - 1936, Edmonton Public School Board from 1937 - 1941, School Superintendent of Consort from 1941 - 1947, Thorhild from 1947 - 966, Commissioned Officer of the Royal Canadian Air Force from 1942 - 1945, Director of Curriculum Alberta Department of Education, Chairman of the High School Committee on Ukrainian from 1966 - 1968. A pioneer educator, humanitarian, historian of the Ukrainian Canadians, teacher and mentor to many students and teachers whose lives were touched by his influence. sponsored by the Smoky Lake Student's Reunion, 1978, Isidore Goresky."

Isidore Goresky was born in 1902 in the Province of Bukovyna which was then in Austria. It later ceded to the Ukraine when Soviet troops took possession during the second world war and was renamed Cherniwtsi. His parents brought him to Canada when he was four. His father, a blacksmith, worked in the limestone quarries of Stoney Mountain, Manitoba.

Isidore attended a two room stone school house near the penitentiary. He completed grade nine there then traveled by train to attend Central Collegiate High School in Winnipeg. In the winter months he stayed at Adam Kosoko Institute where he first studied Ukrainian. Through a student in the Anglican Church which he attended Isidore learned of the classics. He studied Latin, read the books of Hoatio Alger in the Church library.

In the summer of 1916 Isidore, aged 14, when to work for the Greater Winnipeg Water District as a "bull cook" and later as a teamster with one horse to pull a cart of granite rock to the crusher. He earned \$200 that summer a welcome addition to the family's meager resources.

After taking more high school he himself went teaching on a permit for two years, then left to attend university, enrolling in arts. Due to financial difficulties he had to leave university early, but was permitted to write some of the examinations while the rest were postponed until summer school.

In 1921 he married Ann Paley. They moved to Brandon where Isidore went to Normal School. It was a turning point. While in high school his grades had never been high because of the amount of time spent working for farmers but he had no difficulty

completing Normal School. Later he returned to one of the original schools he taught at, Baskerville, to teach for two years. Attending summer school and studying at home he earned his first class grade A Collegiate certificate and accepted a principalship at East Selkirk. Taking his fourth year in Arts on Thursday evenings and Saturday morning was a strain, but completed.

Isidore wanted to become a high school teacher, to pass on his enthusiasm for both literature and history to more mature students. The two schools which advertised that year in the Ukrainian Voice included Smoky Lake. Since he had uncles at Andrew, south of town, he chose Alberta. The one room home was a shock for Ann who was used to larger accommodations in Manitoba. The community, with its varied populations, interested Isidore. The area included people from eastern Halychyna, people he had known in his former school districts, as well as the majority of people who came from the village of Topoiwtsi in eastern Buykovyna.

The village in 1926 was less than 300 inhabitants. Bound on the north side by the street on which the hospital was built, on the west side by the road from the Russian Orthodox Church to Pakan (855) and to the east by the railway. The first general stores were operated by Czumer, Kinasewich, Lazaruk, Peter Dubetz, and Makowichuk. Dr. Lawford kept the drug store. Sam Kosyniuk operated the hotel. Between it and the drug store Gavinchuk had his post office. Across the road Flichuk had a butcher shop where he sold kubassa. The hardware store was owned by Alex Boychuk. John Capowski had the only dry good store. Pter Zaharichuk operated a garage. There were few cars to work on in the early years. Blacksmithing was important in those days and the village shop was run by George Wolanski and the Skoreyko Brothers.

Between 1926 and 1930 remarkable changes came to Smoky Lake as new agencies were required for both cars and farm implements. Other inhabitants of the town included Beilish, the miller, Fred Bmytrowy, a cattle buyer, and Chalhley who operated the livery barn. Kost Romaniuk had a real estate office adjoining Kzumer's store. Other inhabitants, not of Ukrainian origin, were Eckess who was the Austrian German manager of the lumber yard, Billy MacKenzie, the bank manager and John Draper, Ford Motor company agent.

The School Board allowed Isidore to use the science storage room where he worked on his university degree. He completed his master's course in 1929. Isidore made good use of the post master and secretary of the school Nick Gavincuk's library. He began to buy books himself, collecting memoirs and histories written about the unsuccessful attempt of Ukrainians to resurrect a Ukrainian state at the end of a first great war.

The Ukrainian National Hall was the meeting place for all Ukrainian and cultural groups in the village. There were two groups then running the hall, a national group who tried to improve their new country and were staunch supporters of any movements towards an independent Ukraine.

On the other side were hall members supportive of the Soviet Ukraine in federation with Russia. Stalin at that time had not become the dominant leader of the

Soviet Union, only later when he obtained control did he order the liquidation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian intellectuals. Still the second group accepted Stalin's performance as if it was above criticism. There were other divisions as well between the churches.

Isidore was caught in the middle. The farm labour group attempted to take over the National Hall while the other side was busy building the church. Isidore attempted to bring the two groups together by taking part in many of the farm labour groups national home activities, paying for the purchase of books, acting in plays, singing in both choirs. He joined both insurance Mutual Benefits Societies. But the rift became wider all the time and he abandoned any attempts to placate the extremists on the farm group side.

By 1929 a member of the group had been elected to the School Board and Isidore received notification that his services were no longer required. In part it was due to the difficulty in collecting fees from nonresidents high school pupils. He felt that given extra time most of them would pay. He complained to the Department of Education who ordered an investigation.

The Board launched other complaints charging that Ukrainian language had been used in school. The charge was ridiculous, says Isidore in his story in the Smoky Lake history book, but prejudice against the use of other languages in the schools was strong in those days. He had used his Ukrainian to illustrate a point, but rarely. The investigation reinstated him as principal of the school.

His defeat of the farm labour group in their attempt to deprive him of his position at the school had political ramifications. Ukrainians of that era were trying to achieve equality with other Canadians. In the spring of 1930 a delegation of citizens from across the Saskatchewan River, members of the United Farmers of Alberta, approached Isidore to run at the nomination meeting in Vilna. He had decided by that time to quit Smoky Lake and attend the University of Cambridge to earn a Doctorate in History, writing a thesis on the Ukrainian's attempted to establish a free nation in 1917 to 1920. He lost at the nomination, but the winning candidate two weeks later asked him to run instead. A new nomination convention was convened in Vilna and Isidore won. He went on to beat the Liberal and Conservatives too, to become MLA.

Canada was in the middle of the great depression. Says, Isidore, one of the most baffling things about a depression is that its persistence is not recognized until it engulfs all elements of society except those on salary in essential positions. Even they ended up accepting salary cuts. Isidore's salary dropped from \$1875.00 a year to \$1275.00. Farmers who stored grain in elevators were wiped out as wheat plunged to 18 cents a bushel.

Governments at all levels were criticized. Federally R. B. Bennett promised to spend \$25 million to cure unemployment. They spent \$100 million without improving the situation. Farmers strikes were organized against the delivery of grain to elevators. A hunger march was organized to march upon the legislature. Isidore tried to advice people to end the strikes in such a way they could retreat with honor. The poor elevator man was the first to suffer, because the leaders would choose him as the one

responsible for poor grades or prices.

The province tried to deal with foreclosures by setting up a debt adjustment act and increasing the limitations on foreclosure proceedings. Although the banks grumbled they soon realized the futility of foreclosing on a farmer when there was no one left with money to buy the land and taxes still had to be paid. The new act made it compulsory that a farmer had to be left after foreclosure with his horses and machinery to continue farming.

MLA Goresky pushed to have Alex Charnetsky appointed as District Agriculturalist. Other Ukrainians were appointed as Home Economists. The prejudicium against still strong, Isidore tried to counter it by having a school inspector of Ukrainian origin appointed.

When the federal government, to provide employment offered to pay one third towards any municipal road building project Isidore pushed for a north south road from Lac La Biche to Smoky Lake, Andrew, Mundare, Drumheller, parallel to the Edmonton Calgary route. But he couldn't persuade the county councils to cooperate. He did get the start of a highway following the north bank of the North Saskatchewan. Only fifteen miles was ever built, but it was a start.

In 1935 at the beginning of the legislative session he left school as usual with a substitute in charge, asking for a leave of absence from the School Board. A new member of the farm labour group had been elected to the Board and the Board asked for Isidore's employment to be terminated. The request went to the minister but Isidore was tired of fighting and did not dispute the dismissal. Later he suffered defeat at the polls.

Heavy frost had damaged all grain in northern Alberta 1935 and the Ukrainian Farmers of Alberta government went down to defeat. Social Credit took over.

Without a teaching job Isidore took the position of rector at the Ukrainian M. H. Institute. He was tired of teaching because of its uncertainty. He went back to university, completed B.Ed. courses in 1938, got a job with the Edmonton School Board until 1941 when he became a school superintendent at Consort.

From 1942 to 1945 Isidore Goresky joined the R.C.A.F enlisting for active service, but instead found himself in administration for the Empire Training Plan. After the war he went back to Consort. Then from 1947 to 1966 worked for Thorhild School Division as the superintendent. In 1966 he transferred to the Department of Education as Assistant Director of Curriculum. He retired two years later.

Two years ago he moved from Edmonton to White Rock where he now resides.