



Western Development Museum
Curatorial Centre

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 4, 2018

WDM SIGNS MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) WITH SPIRIT WRESTLER PRODUCTIONS ON SASKATCHEWAN DOUKHOBOR LIVING BOOK PROJECT

The Western Development Museum (WDM) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Spirit Wrestler Productions, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the history of the Doukhobor community, and Dr. A. Androsoff, a Doukhobor historian from the University of Saskatchewan, on an exciting new project to preserve the spiritual traditions of the Saskatchewan Doukhobor community.

The “Saskatchewan Doukhobor Living Book Project” tells the story of how the Doukhobors in Saskatchewan practice their faith by documenting the Doukhobor ‘Moleniye’ (prayer service) as practiced by Saskatchewan’s Independent Doukhobors. It captures the oral history of Doukhobor elders and explores how the community has evolved since first immigrating to Saskatchewan almost 120 years ago.

The project consists of three components: a documentary film, an immersive soundscape created by Spirit Wrestler Productions, and an exhibit produced by the WDM. Filming for the documentary began in 2016 with the recording of a complete Doukhobor prayer service and interviews with Doukhobor community members. The audio and video captured from the prayer service is being used to create an immersive soundscape experience that will allow audience members to hear how the Doukhobors’ multi-part harmonies combine to create the distinctive sound of their choral tradition.

“2019 will mark 120 years since nearly eight thousand Russian Doukhobors arrived in what would become Saskatchewan. This year is an opportune time to reflect on the community’s history and showcase Saskatchewan’s diversity,” says WDM Curator Dr. Elizabeth Scott. “When the exhibit opens in Summer of 2019, visitors to the WDM Saskatoon will experience first-hand the sounds of Doukhobor choral harmonization and learn more about Doukhobor life in Saskatchewan through featured artifacts from the WDM Collection, some of which date back to the 1890s.”

“We started this project with the intention of preserving the unique spiritual and cultural traditions of the Doukhobor community in Saskatchewan, which has endured for almost 120 years since first arriving as religious refugees fleeing persecution in Russia,” said Ryan Androsoff, founder and Executive Director of Spirit Wrestler Productions. “As a direct descendant of those original Doukhobor settlers, I felt a personal calling to take on this project to preserve the legacy of my ancestors for future generations. We are very excited about this partnership with the Western Development Museum which will allow us to bring the story of the Doukhobor community to a much wider audience as we tell that story through a unique and immersive audio/visual experience.”

Dr. Ashleigh Androsoff, Doukhobor historian and western Canadian history specialist at the University of Saskatchewan, notes that “many Western Canadians have heard about the Doukhobors, but few have had an opportunity to get to know them personally. This project’s documentary film, soundscape installation, and museum exhibit will provide audiences with the opportunity to learn more about an ethnoreligious minority that has made significant contributions to Saskatchewan’s agricultural and cultural landscapes since their arrival in 1899. Learning more about the Independent Doukhobors’ unique approach to ‘cultural harmonization’, which allowed them to integrate socially, economically, and politically while retaining key features of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, may help us to better understand and support other ethnoreligious minority communities in this province and beyond.”

Once complete, the soundscape and exhibit will be on display at the WDM Saskatoon. More information about the Saskatchewan Doukhobor Living Book Project can be found at: doukhoborlivingbook.ca

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