
PETER SHOSTAK



FOR OUR CHILDREN

A series of paintings depicting early Ukrainian pioneer settlement
in Western Canada

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Cover: "Don't cry, here we are free and will soon prosper"
Oil on canvas. 36" x 36"

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FOREWORD

Peter Shostak is a skillful painter, diligent in his pursuit of a goal. His projects are not superficial, and this current series of paintings shows him tackling a broad range of subjects, everything from the Liverpool docks to the northern lights.

Some time ago, Shostak decided to paint the history of Ukrainian settlers in Canada. Over the course of four-and-a-half years he produced a series of 50 pictures, each of them 36 inches square. The resulting oil paintings are brushed evenly, with a consistency of paint application and a restrained, slightly bleached palette. (I understand he rarely uses yellow, has to work hard to make green effective, and finds alizarin crimson in "almost everything" he paints.)

Shostak told me these paintings are built from his memories and extensive research. He is a former teacher, so method is to be expected. The sources are what he could find about the Ukrainian settlers in Canada: all the published material, the manuscript journals and spoken memories of people who lived the experience.

The artist sought out pictures as well as the words. In archival and family photographs he often found what he wanted on the periphery of a formal composition: an unposed couple behind the wedding party, an unguarded moment which spoke volumes to the artist. What he has depicted actually exists only in his imagination.

Don't assume Shostak is a "photo realist." This artist's particular skill is not to reproduce some historical photograph, but rather to catch and distill a visual image which, through a thousand details, sums up a human experience, unique and eternal. Shostak is more than an illustrator.

For him, setting is as important as subject. The high skies press down on the prairie landscape, keeping the trees small and the horizon long. This convincing atmosphere, with which he endows the settlers' moments, comes from his own upbringing, for he was born to immigrant parents on a quarter section at Bonnyville, Alberta.

On the farm where Shostak grew up, just ten acres were cleared – the rest was bush. At first his family worked the farm with horse-power, later with a tractor. The rhythms of life and landscape are clear in his memories, and renewed by frequent returns to the areas he has painted.

As befits a rather bleak land, the colours he paints with are slightly sombre, and at first attract our interest not with bravura paint handling but with considered pattern and design. Shostak's paintings present a bold, handsome, masculine look. There is a pleasing economy at work in them, which seems proper for a son of the soil. These are pictures which will last.

I'll describe my reaction to one painting, which depicts men building a road bed. With picks and spades they have been clanging away at the rock on the edge of a lake. The dark forest looms beside their digging, and for a moment they have downed tools. As they pause in their toil, these workmen are suddenly engulfed by the silence of this rough and foreign land. No train, no trucks, no radio – just men, and the silent, vast wilderness.

As I look at the painting, Shostak takes me to this other place, this other time. He has created it so truly that I hear the silence. And then I seem to hear birdsong.

Robert Amos, Art Reviewer
Victoria Times-Colonist

ПЕРЕДМОВА

*„...то підемо світами і розвіємо си як
лист по поли... Бог знає, як з нами
буде...”*

(Василь Стефаник. „Кам'яний хрест”)

Сто літ тому, наші предки — перші українські поселенці Канади — вибралися в незнане, в зовсім новий чужий світ. Бажали кращої, багатшої, щасливішої долі не так собі, як своїм дітям і їхнім нащадкам.

Ці перші поселенці не привезли багато матеріального із собою. Везли насіння, господарське знаряддя, і т.п. Але духовних скарбів привезли багато — грудку рідної землі, Святе Письмо, Кобзар, красу рідної мови, пісні, народного мистецтва і звичаїв. Це було таке насіння, плід якого кормив серця і душі з роду в рід. В скорому часі постали церкви, школи, газети, народні доми, освітні і культурні організації.

Хоч Канада привітала цих „людей в кожухах”, вона не все ставилася привітно до цих своїх нових імігрантів, які стаючи канадцами, не хотіли забути своєї рідної землі та її спадщини. Своєю працею та поставою українські канадці вибороли собі права і пошану канадського загалу. За одно століття, українські канадці тепер живуть і працюють по всій Канаді, в усіх галузях суспільного, політичного та економічного життя.

Петро Шостак — син українських імігрантів, народився 1943-го року в маленькому містечку Банівил, Альберта. Змалку любив малювати, і вже в середній школі учні й учителі подивлялися картини цього молодого мистця-самоука. Петро Шостак закінчив університетські студії ступенем магістра, і десять літ був професором при Університеті Вікторія. 1979-го року рішив присвятитися малярству, і відтоді українська та загально-канадська громада з насолодою оглядає і збирає його картини.

Мистець малює сюжети із своїх дитячих літ, коли виростав на фермі в Альберті. Його картини пригадують кожному про невинну молодість, про тяжку працю та про культурні надбання українських поселенців прерій Канади. Шостакові картини не тільки цікаві своїм змістом і красою, а також і заголовками. Він кожній картині дає назву, часто у формі запитання, н.пр., „Чи це кожух твоєї бабуні?”, „Тату, що це комора?”, „Чи можна мені їхати трактором?”. Славний канадський мистець Василь Курилик дуже прихильно написав про твори Шостака після оглядин його виставки в Торонто 1977-го року.

В своїх картинах Петро Шостак зберіг для нас і майбутніх поколінь цю особисту історію багатьох дітей і внуків перших поселенців. Своім мистецтвом він збагатив і українську і канадську культуру. Нам приємно що канадська прем'єра його виставки-турне з нагоди Століття українського поселення Канади відбудеться якраз в нашому Осередку.

Йоанна Левандовська-Кузя
Голова Дирекції ОУКО

O, dear Lord, how difficult it was to make a living!
This is what drove us to emigrate to Canada.



*"The two of us arrived in Hamburg, where an agent put us aboard
a large ship for the ocean crossing. We sailed for twenty-two days.
The trip was both good and bad. After crossing the ocean,
the ship sailed down a river to a big town. It was Montreal."*

**By cutting trees down and laying them across the trail,
we were able to cross the deep mud holes**



*“Every mile or two we came across deep mud ruts filled with water.
In places we had to go two miles off our way in order to get through.
I couldn’t judge if the horses would make it, so I prepared for the worst.”²*

FOR OUR CHILDREN

**On my homestead I want plenty of trees
and rich black soil**



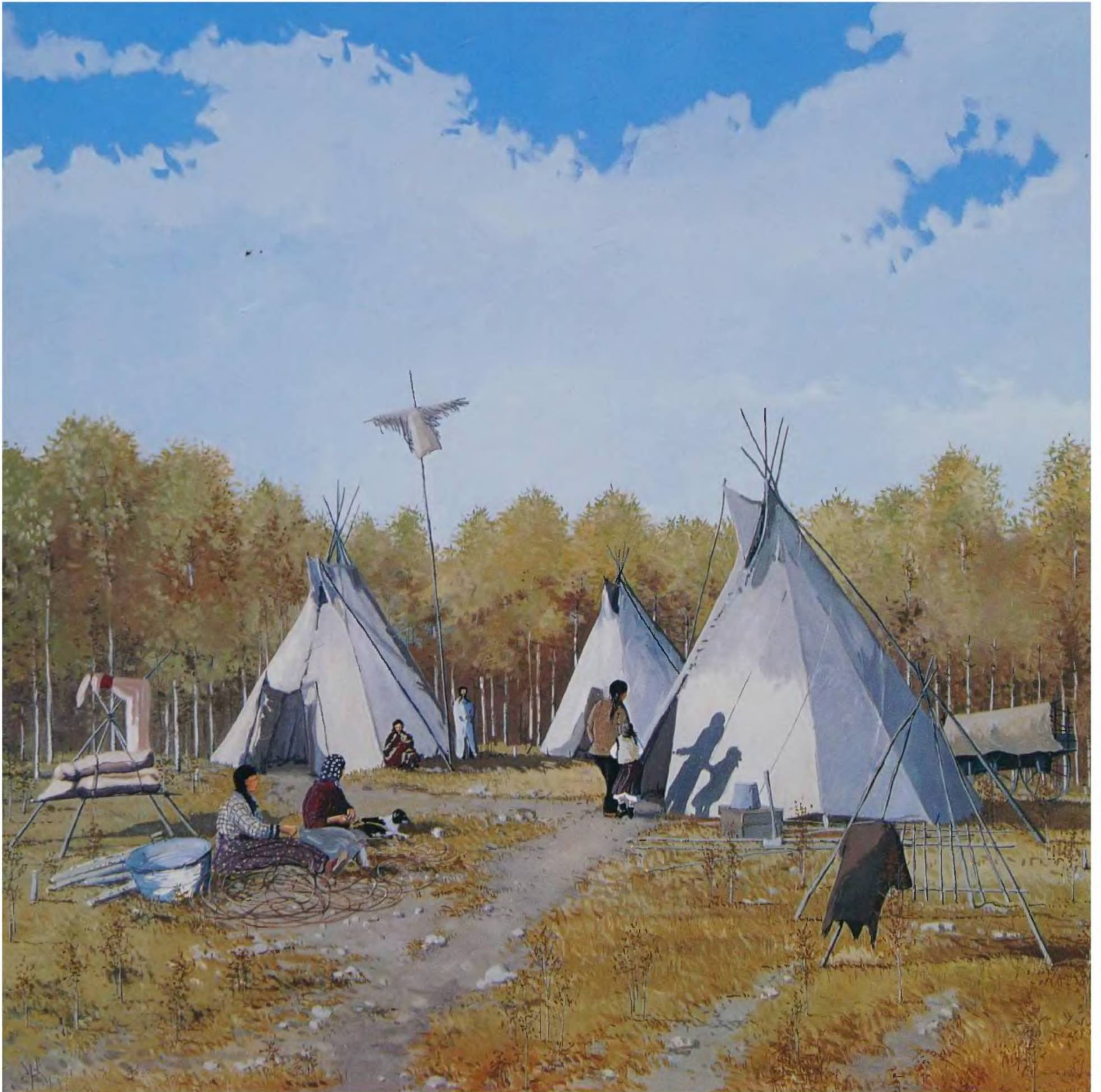
“To me, a twenty-year-old youth, was assigned the task of carrying bags packed with provisions for our band of prospectors on this expedition. Equipped with spades and axes, they forged ahead, testing the quality of the soil here and there.”³

**That first winter many of us would have starved
if it weren't for the rabbits and partridge**



“Rabbits were snared, prairie chickens were trapped on their dancing grounds or by the straw piles and partridge were snared. A long slender wooden pole with a wire loop at the end was used to snare the birds that were scared into the trees by a dog in the early evening.”⁴

I resisted but he continued to drag me into his tent



*"Just as I was about to pass by the tepee, an old Indian with braided hair rushed out of it, grabbed me by the hand, and began to drag me inside. Although I struggled and resisted him with all my might, he had me inside the tepee in no time and made me sit on an animal skin which was spread on the ground."*⁵

Even digging his grave was not easy



“Her employment ended when her father suddenly died of pneumonia in 1900. By the time she could reach home, the funeral was over and she did not see her father again.”⁶

FOR OUR CHILDREN

**In some marriages, love conquered language
and cultural barriers**



*"It was love at first sight though they could not understand
one another, since neither knew a word of the other's strange language.
But then, does love really need a language?"*⁷

**First, as neighbours, we built it together,
and then we fought over it**



“The people lined up in rows on opposite sides of the church with the Easter bread they had brought to be blessed. They yelled at and ridiculed each other so much that one was ashamed and scandalized to listen to them.”⁸

FOR OUR CHILDREN

You judged the teacher by the Christmas concert



*“Ringing his bells and with a merry “ho, ho, ho”
he announced his arrival. With his big pack on his back,
he headed directly for the stage . . .”*”

THE SERIES:

Ukrainian communities are commemorating, in various ways, the centenary of the arrival of the first Ukrainian settlers to Canada.

Peter Shostak is very proud of his Ukrainian heritage and has personally devoted four and one-half years of painting to visually depict the experiences of these hardy Ukrainian people. Background information for the series was gathered through extensive research of

archival photographs, newspaper articles, published histories and personal interviews. Although the images are based upon Ukrainian pioneers, the experiences portrayed in the series were common to all homesteaders, regardless of their ethnic background.

The title of the exhibition "For Our Children" expresses the hope in the hearts of these pioneers as they came ashore in this New Land.

THE ARTIST:

Born of Ukrainian parents in Bonnyville, Alberta, in 1943, Peter Shostak spent his youth on a farm. This rural environment, filled with enriching experiences, has had a major impact on his art.

Shostak left the farm in 1961 to attend the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he enrolled in the Faculty of Education, majoring in Art Education. Four years later he commenced his teaching career as a junior high school teacher, first in Grand Centre, Alberta and then in Edson, Alberta. During this time he also conducted evening drawing and painting classes for adults.

He returned to the University of Alberta in 1968 to work on a graduate degree in Art Education. He moved to Victoria in 1969 and took a position as Assistant Professor Art Education at the University of Victoria. He subsequently taught at the University for ten years but found that administrative and teaching duties as Associate Professor greatly limited the amount of time he had to spend on his own art. Therefore in 1979, he left that

University to pursue a career as a full-time artist, producing oil paintings, watercolours and silkscreen prints.

Two books on his work have been published: "When Nights Were Long" (1982) and "Saturday Came But Once a Week" (1984). His most ambitious publication, which features this entire series of paintings, "*For Our Children*" is due for release in late 1991.

Special recognition of Peter Shostak's achievements in the arts was given by the Government of the Province of Alberta in November, 1983, when it bestowed upon him the status of Honorary Alberta Artist.

In September, 1990, Shostak was the first visual artist to receive the Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts' Award for Artistic Excellence in the field of Visual Arts.

This artist has had many successful solo exhibitions in most major cities in Canada over the last ten years and, consequently, the demand for his work continues to make it difficult for him to satisfy the market.

CATALOGUE OF EXHIBITION

1. O, dear Lord, how difficult it was to make a living!
This is what drove us to emigrate to Canada.
2. Will you remember us when you are in your new home?
3. I promised Dido I would write but how could I,
when I never learned how?
4. What will we do if they don't come back for us?
5. Now smile for the man
6. On my homestead I want plenty of trees and rich,
black soil
7. Don't cry, here we are free and will soon prosper
8. Where are you taking us?
9. Maybe this will keep some of the rain out
10. For ten dollars this is now all yours
11. This is how we spent our first night on our
homestead
12. I left them there in the wilderness and went looking
for work
13. Maybe someone will write a letter for me and ex-
plain to my family where I am working
14. It was very difficult to get ahead if you didn't know
any English
15. After two weeks my hands became calloused and
the work seemed easier
16. My wife will not believe that these animals are ours
17. I resisted but he continued to drag me into his
tent
18. Dr. Oleskow guided us to our new home in Canada
19. That first winter many of us would have starved if it
weren't for the rabbits and partridge
20. For us, the small towns were an introduction to the
rest of Canada
21. It was a joyous day when a priest came and held the
first service in our small church
22. We so looked forward to the arrival of the Christmas
carollers
23. A three day blizzard was only one of the many
hardships we had to endure
24. The journey to see the doctor was a long one
25. Even digging his grave was not easy
26. At least we all came out of it alive
27. Wood was our sole source of fuel
28. I had to wear my sister's red coat
29. We didn't have time for a lot of courting
30. We had to leave the coffin at their gate
31. By cutting trees down and laying them across the
trail, we were able to cross the deep mud holes
32. We didn't eat anything until we brought the blessed
paska home
33. Maybe the wind will keep the fire from our farm
34. The oxen were stubborn and slow but they sure
could pull that plow
35. At night, when I closed my eyes to go to sleep, I
could still see all those rocks
36. I was homesick but my family needed the few
dollars I earned each month
37. With the men working away from home, the women
were left on their own to look after their families
38. Is there a place in this new land where there are no
mosquitoes?
39. If you vote for me . . .
40. In some marriages, love conquered language and
cultural barriers
41. The missionaries kept coming around as long as we
didn't have our own churches and priests
42. Once he got into the honey, there was no way you
could chase him away
43. Most neighbours helped each other
44. We made progress as every year we cleared more
land until there were no more trees left
45. After we agreed that our children needed an educa-
tion, we started by hauling logs
46. After school the teacher tried to teach us about her
way of life
47. First, as neighbours, we built it together, and then
we fought over it
48. I became a Canadian farmer when we no longer
could thresh all of our grain with a flail
49. Where could we escape to?
50. You judged the teacher by the Christmas concert

All paintings are oil on canvas, measuring 36" × 36"

NOTES

1. W. A. Czumer, *Recollections About the Life of the First Ukrainian Settlers in Canada* (Saskatoon, 1978), 13.
2. Lena (Hryhor) Gulutsan, *Deedo's Children* (Edmonton, 1978), 73.
3. H. Piniuta, *Land of Pain, Land of Promise* (Saskatoon, 1978), 101
4. Smoky Lake and District Cultural and Heritage Society, *Our Legacy – History of Smoky Lake and Area* (Winnipeg, 1983), 525-526.
5. H. Piniuta, *Land of Pain, Land of Promise* (Saskatoon, 1978), 84.
6. Andrew Historical Society, *Dreams and Destinies* (Edmonton, 1980), 582.
7. H. Piniuta, *Land of Pain, Land of Promise* (Saskatoon, 1978), 49.
8. W. A. Czumer, *Recollections About the Life of the First Ukrainian Settlers in Canada* (Saskatoon, 1978), 56.
9. Thorhild and District Historical Society, *Building and Working Together* (Winnipeg, 1985), 159-160.

CREDITS

Credit for an exhibition of this magnitude can never be claimed solely by the artist. This series of paintings, created over a period of four and one-half years, required cooperation and input from many individuals. Most importantly, I wish to thank my wife, Geraldine, who, over this period of time, not only acted as my most valued critic but also continually provided support and encouragement. Her role in researching visual and written archival material provided the foundation upon which these paintings were created.

Norah Caddell, our dedicated secretary, played a key role in looking after the many tasks and details which must be dealt with in a project such as this.

