

# The Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies

## Faculty of Arts, University of Alberta

Originally founded in 1998 as the Canadian Centre for Austrian and Central European Studies, the Wirth Institute is one of North America's leading centres for the study of this complex and ever-evolving part of the world, both in the past and in the present. (See the Institute's website: [www.wirth.ualberta.ca](http://www.wirth.ualberta.ca).)

It is one of a network of nine diverse centres, institutes, foundations, and research and teaching units funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMWFW): [www.en.bmwfw.gv.at](http://www.en.bmwfw.gv.at). The others are the Institute for East European History at the University of Vienna, Austria, the Austria Center at the Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic, the Center for Central European Studies at Andrassy University in Budapest, Hungary, the Center for Austrian Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel, the Foundation for Austrian Studies/Central And East European Studies Centre at the University of Leiden, Netherlands, the Program for the Study of Austria at the University of California, Berkeley, the Center for Austrian Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and the Center Austria at the University of New Orleans (all USA).

Funded in large part by generous endowments from Austro-Canadians Manfred and Alfred Wirth, as well as the Austrian Canadian Council, the Institute supports a variety of academic and cultural undertakings each year at the University of Alberta, across Canada, and in Europe. It has a national mandate to support the study of Central Europe and has been officially recognized not only by Austria, but by the governments of Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The Wirth Institute has sponsored conferences and workshops as well as research activities from Cape Breton University to the University of Victoria. This year, it sponsored a workshop on the Austrian School of Economics at McGill University. Spring, 2016 the Institute sponsored an interdisciplinary conference "Multi-Culturalism in Central Europe" at the University of Wrocław in Poland.

The mandate of the Institute is not only national and international, it is interdisciplinary. The Wirth Institute is based in the Faculty of Arts at UAlberta and has ties to that unit's sixteen departments in the Fine and Performing Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences. The Institute sponsors musical performances and scholarship competitions, supports publications through grant subsidies, organizes conferences and exhibitions, and hosts doctoral researchers from Central Europe who are working on their dissertations in various fields. This upcoming academic

year, doctoral fellows from Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland will be on staff in Edmonton pursuing dissertation projects in the fields of Philosophy, Linguistics, Russian Literature, and History. In addition, visiting faculty members from the University of Innsbruck's Unit of Language Education and the University of Silesia's Institute of Anglophone Cultures and Literatures will be at the University of Alberta for short-term stays administered by the Institute. It is planned that visiting professors from Austria and Hungary will also join the Faculty of Arts for Academic Year 2017-2018.

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Institute Director (and CHA member) Joseph F. Patrouch of the University of Alberta's Department of History and Classics is a historian of early modern Central Europe, the Habsburg Dynasty and the Holy Roman Empire. He has led the Institute since 2011, following Founding Director and Professor Emeritus of History, Franz A.J. Szabo. Patrouch's research and teaching concentrate on the Habsburg Dynasty as a world-wide phenomenon, one that touched not only Central Europe, but Western Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania as well. In Fall, 2017 he will co-curate an exhibition in the Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta with Felice Lifshitz of the Department of Women's and Gender Studies there. The exhibit, titled "Salt, Sword, and Crozier: Books and Coins from the Prince-Bishopric of Salzburg (c. 1500-1800)" will be accompanied by a catalog published by the University of Alberta Press and a series of lectures by the curators as well as by scholars from



Austria and the US. The books on display will be drawn from the University of Alberta's Salzburg Collection: [bpsc.library.ualberta.ca/collections/archbishop-of-salzburgs-library](http://bpsc.library.ualberta.ca/collections/archbishop-of-salzburgs-library)

Major research emphases of the Wirth Institute include the study of the histories of the Jewish communities of Central Europe. In 2015, the Rudolf Vrba Holocaust Reading Room was established at the Institute. Named in memory of Holocaust survivor Rudolf Vrba, the Reading Room contains hundreds of first-hand accounts of the Holocaust as well as other related materials. An inventory is available on line through the Institute's website. Interested researchers are encouraged to contact the Institute for more information on how to access the Reading Room. In addition, the Institute sponsors an annual endowed lecture on the Holocaust. Funded largely through a generous donation by the Holocaust survivor Saul Reichert and his wife Toby, this year's lecture will be delivered by Mark Roseman of Indiana University on October 17. A second endowed lecture series on European Jewish history before the 1930's is named in honour of the retired UAlberta literature professor Tova Yedlin and will be delivered by David Rechter of the University of Oxford on October 24.

For members of the Canadian Historical Association, the Wirth Institute's focus on immigration from Central Europe to Canada may be of interest. Starting in the 1990's, even before the Institute's foundation, researchers have collected oral histories from Austrian immigrants to Canada. While some of the findings from this research have been published, much more work remains to be done. An exhibition outlining the contours of Austrian and Austro-Hungarian immigration to Canada was shown in numerous locations across Canada and in Austria. It is currently housed at the Institute and available for display.

The Institute and its director have participated in various projects relating to the role Austro-Canadians have played in the development of the Alpine tourist industry in western Canada. This theme is related to the Institute's ties to the Canadian Mountain Network and the Mountain Studies Initiative at the University of Alberta. The mountain films of the important Austro-Canadian mountain climber, skier and director Hans Gmoser, for example, have been a focus of a number of Wirth Institute-sponsored events.

Together with the Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) at the University of Alberta, the Wirth Institute has sponsored and continues to sponsor research and publications

on the histories of Austro-Hungarian immigration to Canada before the First World War. In 2014, the Wirth Institute and CIUS co-sponsored the conference "Canada, the Great War and the Internment of Enemy Aliens, 1914-1920" at the site of one of the period's internment camps, the Cave and Basin National Historic Site in Banff, Alberta. The proceedings from this conference are to be published by the CIUS Press. More research is planned on the topic of the internment of Austro-Hungarians by the Canadian authorities, as well as on the military and social history of Austro-Hungarians' participation in that war more generally. This will be tied to the display of military gear, uniforms, and other materials from the Austro-Hungarian Imperial and Royal Army which have recently been acquired by the University of Alberta Museums. (An unrelated military history project in planning now relates to the training of Czecho-Slovak and Polish airmen in Canada during World War Two.)

In addition to Austrian and Austro-Hungarian immigration to Canada, the Wirth Institute has also begun the exploration of Hungarian immigration here as well, particularly as a result of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. An international conference on the topic titled "Hungary 1956: Reverberations of a Revolution" was held in October, 2016 to commemorate the revolution's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This interest in political migration is connected to the Institute's concentration recently on political and economic migration in contemporary Europe in general and the EU in particular. Because of the Institute's ties to Croatia and Slovenia, the impacts of recent migration waves on the political development of the post-Yugoslav spaces have been of particular relevance and it is hoped that further research in this area will be developed.

It is hoped that members of the Canadian Historical Association will consider ways that they can interact with the Wirth Institute for Austrian and Central European Studies. If you have ideas for conferences, exhibitions, performances, research projects or other initiatives relating to the complex histories of Central Europe or Central Europeans in Canada, please contact the Director. In 2018, the Institute will be celebrating its twentieth anniversary: it is strongly hoped that many readers of this *Bulletin* will discover ways to explore Central Europe's many facets together with the Institute as we move into our third decade.

*Joseph F. Patrouch is a Professor in the Department of History and Classics, University of Alberta and Director of the Wirth Institute.*