

29. Jaroslaw

Saint Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of Saint Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church trace back to the early 20th century, shortly after Ukrainian homesteaders arrived in the Star-Skaro area. In 1906, a school established north of Bruderheim gave the district its name—Jaroslaw—in honor of the town near present-day Przemyśl, Poland, from which many early Ukrainian immigrants to the Beaver Creek area originated. After settling, these pioneering farmers quickly turned to the task of establishing a place of worship.

Construction of a modest log church, capped by a small dome, began in 1902. The sanctuary was completed two years later and registered under the name “Congregation of the Greek Catholic Church at Beaverlake in the District of Alberta, in the North-West Territories of Canada” on December 1, 1904. The community was initially served by Ukrainian Catholic priests of the Basilian Order from Mundare, as the founding members hailed from the traditionally Greek Catholic part of Eastern Galicia under Austro-Hungarian rule. The congregation adopted Saint Demetrius the Martyr as the patron of their church, legally changing the name on the Certificate of Title on July 29, 1908.

Religious Strife and Transition to Orthodoxy

The early decades of Ukrainian settlement in Canada were marked by not only physical hardship but also religious controversy. Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant missionaries competed vigorously for the allegiance of Ukrainian newcomers. These denominational rivalries were further complicated by political issues, particularly the rise of Ukrainian national consciousness shortly before and during World War I. This often led to divisive disputes within





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Ukrainian settlements across Canada, including the Beaver Creek colony northeast of Edmonton.

At Saint Demetrius, tensions between parishioners and their conservative clergy grew. A significant source of conflict was the Catholic priests' opposition to the pro-Ukrainian movement in Canada. The clergy's continued use of archaic Church Slavonic in Mass, rather than the modern Ukrainian vernacular, further exacerbated tensions. The surge in Ukrainian national sentiment, fueled by the brief establishment of an independent Ukrainian government during the revolution and the founding of the patriotically oriented Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC) in 1918, deepened the rift.

In Jaroslaw, these divisions widened. After 1923, the Basilian Fathers ceased visiting the community from Mundare. Two years later, Rev. D. Seneta was invited to celebrate the patron feast day liturgy at Saint Demetrius, marking the first time the Ukrainian language was used in the sanctuary. That same year, Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich visited nearby Bruderheim, inspiring local support for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Theodorovich, a founding bishop of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine, embodied the rebirth of national Orthodox traditions in the homeland.

For several years, tensions persisted at Saint Demetrius as parishioners debated the question of denominational affiliation. The majority favored joining the UGOC, while a small minority wished to remain Catholic. A compromise was reached to buy out the minority faction, allowing them to build their own place of worship or use the funds as they saw fit. A formal memorandum of agreement was signed on March 16, 1928, granting six Catholic loyalists \$400 for their share in the original church's construction and

maintenance. Ownership of a strip of land on the north side of the church property, known as the "old graveyard," was transferred to the Catholic parishioners, who relinquished all claims on the church. The graveyard transfer was finalized on March 20, 1928, and clear title to the church was awarded to the Orthodox adherents on March 11, 1929.

Construction and Community Life

Despite the split, the cemetery continued to be used by both denominations, reflecting the amicable resolution of an otherwise divisive conflict. Unlike many similar disputes, Saint Demetrius Church was not destroyed by arson—a testament to the wisdom and tolerance shown by both sides. Eventually, the Catholic residents of Jaroslaw built the Holy Spirit Catholic Church on the opposite side of Highway 38, just east of Saint Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

From its inception, Saint Demetrius was central to commemorating significant feast days. The Feast of the Epiphany on January 19 was especially popular. The celebration began with a procession to the North Saskatchewan River, where hundreds gathered around a cross carved from ice for the annual blessing of the water, commemorating Christ's baptism in the Jordan River. The event concluded with the festive firing of shotguns. This outdoor Epiphany celebration continued until the early 1930s, after which it was moved indoors.

By the end of the Great Depression, the original sanctuary was deemed outdated and in need of replacement. Between 1939 and 1940, a new Saint Demetrius Church was constructed under the guidance of carpenter and executive member George Doskoch. To preserve the work of the pioneers, some timber from the original church was reused. Additional logs were donated by Wasyl Rutar and sawn into lumber by Mike Serink, with

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construction assistance from Anton Tancowny, Hrynko Kochan, George Lewak, Paul Holowach, Andrei Nepiuk, and George Onushko. Seventeen-year-old Russ Pysmeny served as the "gopher" for the volunteer work crew.

The new cruciform structure was crowned with a large dome and featured a storm porch attached to the apse. Although it was built over the original foundation, the layout was inadvertently reversed, causing the congregation to face west instead of east, contrary to Eastern Church tradition. The completed Saint Demetrius Church was consecrated by Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich during his 1940 visit. At that time, the congregation lacked a permanent priest and was served by clergy from Edmonton and Vegreville.

For many years, the dome from the original church lay at the edge of the cemetery until it was inadvertently destroyed during a property cleanup. Interestingly, neither the original sanctuary nor its successor had a bell or bell tower.

Later Years and Preservation

In 1943, seven Divine Liturgies were celebrated at Saint Demetrius, the same number reported in 1947 when the congregation had eleven members. By 1951, membership had decreased to eight, though the number of services remained consistent. In 1953, the Consistory suggested assigning a single priest to serve both Saint Demetrius and nearby Saint John's Church in Peno to strengthen the Ukrainian Orthodox presence in a region. Despite a declining membership due to deaths and rural depopulation, the congregation continued its efforts to preserve the church. In 1959, Saint Demetrius commissioned an iconostasis from Edmonton artist Wadym Dobrolige (1913-1973), a major project costing \$1,200, funded by the commitment of nine active families.

The congregation's situation remained stable for the next two decades. In 1983, parishioners requested that Saint Demetrius be transferred to the Radway district across the North Saskatchewan River. Three years later, the church officially became a member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada, having never previously completed the procedural requirements for formal affiliation.



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Priests

Dydyk (UGC)
Rue Hura (UGC)
Ladyka (UGC)
Kryzanowski (UGC)
D. Seneta (1925-1927)
E. Olendy (1928-1929)
I. Dmytriw (1930-1932)
D. Stratychuk (1932)
T. Horbay (1932-1933)
T. Kisiliuk (1933-1936)
H. Hrycyna (1937-1940)
P. Sametz (1936-1938)
L. Berezitsky (1938-1941)
P. Melnychuk (1940-1943)
A. Sarmatiuk (1941-1942)
A. Chrustawka (1943-1949)
E.S. Ulan (1951)
M. Flak (1952-1956)
H. Wasyliw (1956-1958)
A. Shcherban (1958-1983)
A. Palamarchuk (1983-present)

Cemetery

Situated on the same parcel of land, north of the church. The first burial was that of Andrew Mandryk Sr. in 1902.

Location and Feast Day

North of Bruderheim, at the southwest corner of the junction of Highway 38 and Range Road 203, NE 33-56-20 W4, County of Lamont. *GPS Coordinates:* 53.889251, -112.901779 | Their *Feast Day* is November 8.

Founding Members

Iwan Berazza
Iwan Danylko
Paul Holowach
Kyrylo Holowaty
Stefan Horhut
Fred Iwaschuk
Jacob Iwaschuk
Hrynko Kochan
Anton Korotash
Harry (Dmytro) Kulmatyski
Hryhory Lewak
Andrew Mandryk Sr.
Andrei Nepiuk
Fedko Nykypilo
George (Panko) Onushko
Jakym Stromesk
Anton (John) Tancowny
Fred Zacharko
Senko Zacharko



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