

36. Morecambe

Saint John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church

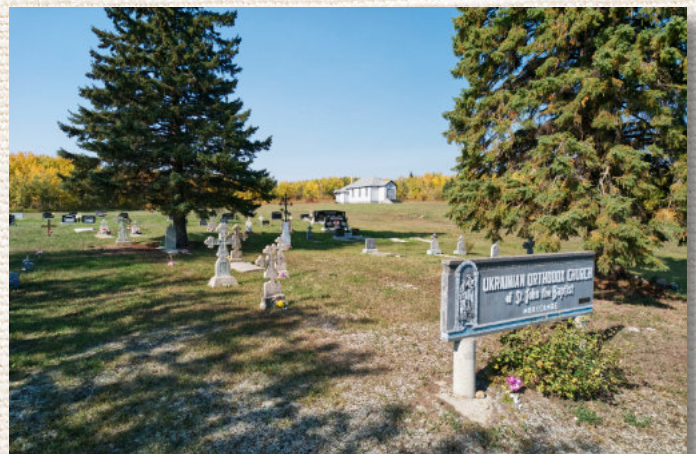
At an organizational meeting held in 1913, settlers of the Morecambe district decided to proceed with the construction of a church. A ten-acre site was donated for this purpose by P. Melnychuk, and by 1918, the congregation had obtained clear title to the property, with the church formally registered with the government.

The first sanctuary was a modest structure built by volunteers from donated logs. The congregation adopted the name “Russo Orthodox Church of Oshichlib” (Oshykhlib) after the Bukovynian village in Kitsman Raion, Chernivtsi Oblast, where many of Morecambe’s homesteaders traced their roots. The interior and exterior walls were mud-plastered and whitewashed before being adorned with icons brought from the old country by the pioneer founders. Later, a porch was added, and the exterior walls were sheathed to better insulate the building from the elements. Parishioners once again donated their labor and materials, while the women prepared and delivered meals to the work crew.

The Oshichlib church became a focal point for worship and community celebrations, with the annual Resurrection Liturgy drawing people from near and far to have their baskets blessed at Easter.

For many years, the congregation received occasional pastoral care from priests with the Russian Orthodox Mission. When performing services in the community, the Two Hills-based priests stayed overnight at the nearby farm of the Taschuk family.

In 1944, Fr. L. Diachina succeeded in bringing the congregation over to the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC), attracting



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the support of local farmers who had been active in Morecambe's All Saints Ukrainian Catholic parish, established in 1935-36. It was during the early 1940s that members of the Oshichlib church dedicated their sanctuary to St. John the Baptist.

Challenges and Decline

Several difficult years followed. By 1946, membership had dwindled to a handful, and general meetings were no longer being held. A core group of dedicated members persevered, and in 1951-1952, Morecambe reported to the Consistory that it had twelve members (cited as only eight by Fr. Shwetz in a 1951 letter) and was celebrating five to six Divine Liturgies a year. Around this time, the congregation formally became affiliated with the UGOC, though it continued to struggle with declining membership. By 1956, only three families actively supported the church, with most local residents preferring to travel to nearby towns to worship.

In the mid-1950s, the original log church was destroyed by fire, believed to be arson resulting from a community conflict. The bell also disappeared from the bell tower and was never returned. Services were subsequently held in the local Taras Shevchenko National

Home, but membership soon fell off so dramatically that the congregation's executive notified the Consistory that parish life was no longer viable. Migration from the Morecambe district to Edmonton and other areas steadily depleted the congregation, while the proximity of churches in neighboring Musidora and Myrnam further eroded local support.

Revival and Final Years

Despite these challenges, the Morecambe community staged a determined revival. In 1962, they restored the parish cemetery, and in 1963, they purchased and remodeled a former schoolhouse to create a new place of worship. In 1966, Rev. P. Zubrytsky celebrated the patron saint's day liturgy in Morecambe, possibly one of the last such commemorations held in St. John the Baptist Church.

By 1971, it was reported that the congregation had dwindled to the point where "it only existed on paper" and had not celebrated a single liturgy that year. Nevertheless, another major cleaning of the graveyard took place in 1986, and the burial ground remains the site of annual "provody," held in remembrance of deceased church members. The church itself now stands abandoned.



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Priests

I. Chrustawka (Russian Orthodox Church)

A. Chrustawka (1926-)

L. Diachina (1942-1946)

M. Kryschuk (1958-1961)

M. Kryshthanowich

A. Teterenko (1957-1965)

R. Denesiuk (1966)

W. Melnychuk (1966-1968)

W. Yurkiwsky

P. Zubrytsky

M. Sawchenko (1985-1994)

W. Sapiha (1994-present)

Location and Feast Day

East of Musidora, north of Highway 45, at NE 23-54-11 W4. Located in the County of Two Hills, the church sits northwest of the former village of Morecambe, now a ghost town. *GPS Coordinates: 53.680112, -111.501834* Their *Feast Day* is July 7

Founding Members

I. Tkachuk

M. Topolinsky

M. Vegara

L. Boida

G. Chomyk

N. Chomyc

J. Drabiuk

M. Ewasiuk

J. Colowaty

J. Hrehirchuk

K. Iskiw

A. Krwenchuk

S. Krewenchuk

O. Lakusta

J. Marian

S. Mehara

G. Lupul

W. Maksymiuk

I. Marianych

I. Nachey

I. Philipiuk

W. Romaiuk

L. Saganiuk

I. Soloniuk

V. Semenovich

F. Shewchuk

J. Slywka

M. Smiliar

S. Taschuk

D. Topolinsky

Cemetery

Located on the southwest corner of the church property, with several graves situated apart to the northwest.



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