

51. Smoky Lake

Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The Orthodox presence in Smoky Lake dates back to 1903, when Bukovynian settlers organized a congregation under the Russian Orthodox Mission. However, not all priests serving the area were highly regarded by the more nationally conscious members of the growing Ukrainian community.

Writing to *Ukrains'kyi Holos* in February 1922, local photographer and businessman Nicholas Gavinchuk reported that farmers were becoming increasingly prosperous and more engaged in Ukrainian cultural and national affairs, largely due to the activities of the *Narodnyi Dim* (National Home). He noted the efforts of Rev. Ivan Chrustawka, who had been assigned to Holy Trinity Russo-Orthodox Church in 1921. While Gavinchuk described Chrustawka as supportive of Ukrainian interests, his affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church made him unacceptable to Smoky Lake leaders who sought to establish a congregation under the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOCC).

With growing national awareness, figures like Gavinchuk were determined to rally local support for a distinctly Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This vision took shape in 1924 when Rev. Ivan Kusey was invited to celebrate the first Orthodox liturgy in Ukrainian at the home of Joseph Danylevych. This historic service led to the congregation's formal organization on June 9, 1924. Father Kusey returned the following year to celebrate Palm Sunday on April 21, further solidifying the commitment of Orthodox adherents.

Later in 1925, Rev. Dmytro Seneta settled in Smoky Lake, providing regular services for the congregation. Initially, members held services in private homes before utilizing the *Taras Shevchenko Narodnyi Dim*. Besides his religious



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duties, Fr. Seneta played a key role in developing the community, organizing a church choir, a Ukrainian school, a children's orchestra, and an adult secular choir.

On October 18, 1925, Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich visited Smoky Lake, inspiring parishioners in their efforts. By the following year, the congregation had formally organized, with 32 members. N. Woycenko was elected the first executive head, with N. Gavinchuk as secretary and I. Kinasevich as treasurer.

Services were held at Smoky Lake School, but in 1927, Bolshevik sympathizers on the school board prohibited religious gatherings. As a result, no liturgies were held in Smoky Lake during the winter of 1927-1928.

Undeterred, the congregation resolved to build a church. In the spring of 1928, William Czumer was appointed head of the construction committee. Under the supervision of N. Woycenko and a dedicated group of

volunteers, including carpenters S. Tkach and M. Romaniuk, construction moved quickly. By the fall, the new sanctuary—one of the largest Ukrainian Orthodox churches in Western Canada—was completed. The first liturgy was celebrated in the new church by Rev. T. Horbay on November 25, 1928. The following spring, Fr. Horbay relocated to Smoky Lake, making it the base from which Ukrainian Orthodox priests served nearby rural congregations.

Cultural and Artistic Contributions

During his tenure as parish priest, the artistically inclined Father Lorne Kubin enriched the interior of the church with decorative *rozphys* (traditional Ukrainian painting) and crafted stained-glass windows. The interior features a striking mauve color scheme and an impressive three-tiered *ikonostasis* (icon screen). In 1994, the domes of the church were re-clad in copper.



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Priests

- I. Kusey (1924-1925)
- D. Seneta (1925 - c. 1927)
- T. Horbay (1926-1932)
- I. Mayba (1932-1936)
- H. Wasyliv (1936-1943)
- D. Senyshyn (1944-1949)
- D. Foty (1949-1950)
- F. Kulchynsky (1950-1951)
- P. Satsevich (1951-1961)
- S. Hrebeniuk (1961-1962)
- Y. Rybalka (1962-1965)
- Y. Turzhansky (1965-1970)
- S. Hredil (1970-1973)
- L. Diachina (1973-1975)
- L. Kubin (1975-1977)
- S. Semotiuk (1977?)
- L. Kubin (1978-1988)
- O. Hudyma (1988-1991)
- T. Udod (1992-1995)
- J. Plewa (1995-2003)
- B. Ambrosie (2003-present)

Cemetery

Located immediately south of Smoky Lake, on the west side of Secondary Highway 855, at SE 16-59-17 W4.
Cemetery GPS: 54.093943, -112.479304



Location and Feast Day

In the town of Smoky Lake, south of Highway 28 and on the east side of Secondary Highway 855, at the southeast corner of 50th Avenue and White Earth Street. *GPS Coordinates: 54.111020, -112.475374* | Their *Feast Day* is celebrated on the Thursday of the fifth week after Easter. The congregation owns and maintains a National Home.

Founding Members

	Prominent Members
N. Cherniak	N. Capovsky
J. Danylovich	W. Czumer
H. Faryna	F. Dmytrow
N. Gavinchu	W. Elaschuk
I. Kinasewich	I. Goresky
W. Lazaruk	D. Grekul
S. Popowich	S. Kostyniuk
V. Skoreyko	H. Kotyk
N. Woycenko	I. Minailo
	P. Palichuk
	I. Palylyk
	V. Radomsky
	K. Ramaniuk
	W. Ratsoy
	W. Romanchuk
	G. Socholotsky
	I. Stogryn
	S. Stogryn
	S. Tkach
	A. Vylychuk
	G. Wasylenchuk
	F. Warawa
	P. Warwara

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