

64. Waskatenau

Saint Volodymyr Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of Ukrainian religious life in Waskatenau were marked by controversy, as allegiances were initially divided between Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox supporters. On May 25, 1934, local residents collectively purchased six acres of land for a church and burial ground. However, by 1937, divisions became apparent when a pro-Catholic faction invited Rev. Dzigolik of the Basilian Fathers to conduct an outdoor Mass on the commonly held property. That same year, a Ukrainian Orthodox congregation was officially established, with Joseph Mulak, Andrew Shwetz, and John Kobrinko forming the church executive.

In 1938, Rev. M. Fyk celebrated the first Orthodox liturgy in a hall above the Co-op store, a space also used by Catholics before they relocated their services to John Kobrinko's pool hall. Interestingly, despite being a founding member of the Orthodox executive, Kobrinko's family ultimately chose the Catholic faith due to his wife's influence.

Initially, both groups coexisted uneasily. Tensions escalated when a visiting Basilian Father declared his unwillingness to share a church with the Orthodox. This prompted a fierce struggle for denominational control over the property originally obtained from the CNR for \$600. Eventually, the Orthodox secured a two-thirds majority in 1940, paying the Catholic faction \$200 to settle the dispute. The Catholic group subsequently acquired a four-acre parcel northwest of town for a cemetery, allowing the two congregations to part ways and heal divisions over time.

That summer, Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich blessed the Orthodox cemetery and a cross marking the future church site, strengthening the fledgling congregation. By 1940, the Orthodox community began renting the Anglican Church for





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periodic services, a practical solution as both denominations lacked full-time pastoral care. The congregation, legally incorporated in 1939, reported 27 adherents. It formally joined the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada in 1944.

In 1946, recognizing the need for a permanent place of worship, the congregation decided to purchase the Anglican Church rather than build anew. At the time, St. Volodymyr's had 22 family memberships and held six services annually, constrained by a shortage of priests in the Radway district. By 1950, with 28 paid members and an increasing demand for monthly liturgies, the Anglican Church became too small. On March 1, 1952, a resolution was passed to build a new church, with Tekla Dehod and Alex Bozniak leading the initiative. A vigorous fundraising campaign followed, including carolling, pyrohy suppers, teas, concerts, and carnivals. The well-known church builder Ivan Mnoholitny of Kahwin was hired to oversee the project with assistance from Opanas Denesiuk. The entire congregation contributed, with women washing rocks for the foundation and men volunteering as carpenters.

Construction commenced on May 27, 1953. The final liturgy in the old Anglican Church was celebrated on Easter Sunday, April 25, 1954, by Very Rev. H. Wasyliw. The building was later sold and converted into a Masonic Temple. The new cruciform church (40' x 60') featured four small domes and a large central dome with windows over the nave. Thanks to volunteer labor, the total cost remained at a modest \$19,200. The Waskatenau branch of the Ukrainian Women's Association generously contributed to the furnace, chandelier, and furnishings. On July 28, 1954, during the patron saint's day commemorations, the church cornerstone was solemnly blessed by Very Rev. Wasyliw, joined by Very Rev. M. Fyk and Rev. P. Satsewich of Smoky Lake. A large

crowd attended the celebration, which took place on a beautiful midsummer day.

Growth and Challenges

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by growth and consolidation. By 1960, St. Volodymyr's had 45 paid families (149 individuals), with nearly as many sympathizers. The church basement was gradually finished to accommodate a hall and kitchen, supporting the activities of the Ukrainian Self-Reliance League. The congregation flourished, with many young CYMK members filling the pews. A major highlight was Archbishop Andrew's visit in 1967, marking the congregation's 30th anniversary, led by Rev. I. Kulish and Rev. O. Flak.

However, by 1970, a shortage of priests left the Radway district without a resident minister. Clergy commuted from Edmonton as needed, aided by improved rural roads. This challenge led to an unexpected blessing when Rev. A. Scherban facilitated the transfer of the old iconostas from St. John's Cathedral to St. Volodymyr's. Opanas Denesiuk and Paul Dehod oversaw the installation, with additional icons of Sts. Volodymyr and Olga placed flanking the deacons' doors. The new iconostas was consecrated at the 1974 feast day, with Rt. Rev. M. Chomiak and the St. John's Cathedral choir leading the Divine Liturgy.

By the late 1970s, frustrations grew over the lack of a resident priest, and changing rural demographics began affecting membership. In 1983, Rev. Alexander Palamarchuk was assigned to the Radway district, revitalizing the congregation by establishing Ukrainian and religious studies courses at St. Volodymyr's. The church underwent major repainting in 1984-85.

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Modern Developments

By 1992, in celebration of the centennial of Ukrainian settlement in Canada, the congregation initiated plans for a bell tower. After extensive deliberation, a 700-pound bell was purchased from Edmonton for \$5,000. A steel, 27-foot-high structure was designed by Paul Dehod to house the new bell, along with two smaller bells donated by Jim and Anne Zynk. The tower was completed on November 13, 1992, at a total cost of \$15,000, with members contributing volunteer labor. The

bells first rang in honor of the 50th wedding anniversary of longtime church activists Steve and Sophie Shwetz and were officially blessed at the 1993 feast day.

In 1996, Peter Mushinsky, a visiting craftsman from Ukraine, restored all the church's windows and replaced the dome windows for \$1,200. At present, ongoing renovations totaling \$16,000 reflect the congregation's commitment to preserving St. Volodymyr's legacy.

Priests

M. Fyk (1938–1943)
H. Wasyliw (1943–1945)
M. Fyk (1945–1948)
D. Senishen (1948–1949)
H. Wasyliw (1949–1955)
O. Flak (1955–1961)
D. Stratychuk (1961–1963)
J. Kulish (1963?–1971)
A. Scherban (1971–1974)
H. Fil (1974–1975)
M. Sawchenko (1976)
A. Scherban (1977–1979)
L. Kubin (1979–1980)
A. Scherban (1980–1983)
A. Palamarchuk (1983–2003)

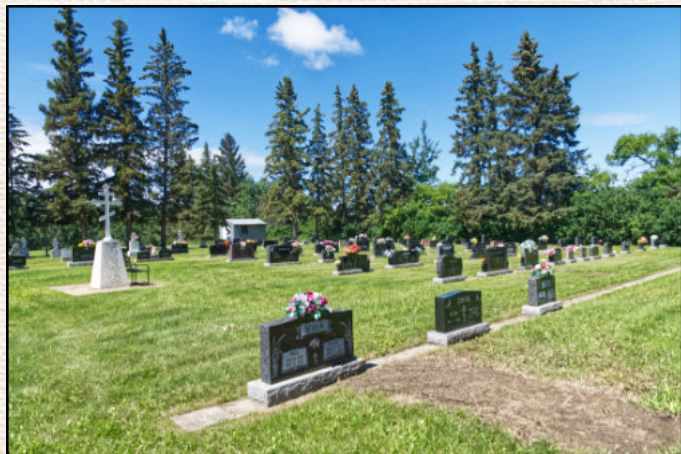


Location and Feast Day

East bank of Waskatenau Creek, north side of 50th (Railway) Avenue (Twp Rd. 590, west of RR 193), in the southeast outskirts of town (Block 11, Plan 33-46), County of Smoky Lake. *GPS Coordinates:* 54.093654, -112.777331
Their *Feast Day* is July 28.

Cemetery

Located east of the sanctuary. The first burial was Nick Antoniuk (June 3, 1940).



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