

20. Edwand

Saint Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of Saint Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church trace back to 1903, when a Russian Orthodox mission established a small chapel south of the current church site. This coincided with the founding of a mission in Smoky Lake. That same year, the necessity for a cemetery arose after the death of a local homesteader. A hilltop site overlooking the White Earth Valley was chosen for the graveyard. Trustees filed a claim for a 40-acre subdivision at the Pine Creek Land Titles Office, funded by donations from area settlers.

Construction of a log church began in 1904. Volunteers assembled stones, logs, and other materials under the direction of master carpenter Todor Bille, a native of Bukovyna. By 1906, services were being held in the partially completed sanctuary. The church was formally consecrated on October 14, 1907, the feast day of Saint Mary the Protectress.

In its early years, priests from the Russian Orthodox mission provided pastoral care to the Bukovynian settlers. During the 1920s and 1930s, liturgies were held two to three times a month, drawing large crowds despite difficult trails and weather conditions. Unfortunately, records from this period were lost in a 1928 fire at Holy Trinity Russo-Orthodox Church in Smoky Lake.

Between 1936 and 1943, Father Hryhorii Wasyliv of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC) occasionally served at Edwand. Following the death of Father Cependa in 1958, the congregation was left without regular spiritual care. Parishioners began inviting UGOC priests to serve their needs. At the annual meeting on December 11, 1960, they formally resolved to affiliate with the UGOC. Some members resisted, remaining loyal to the Russian Orthodox Church. By 1965, membership had



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dropped to 15 from its previous 35. However, new members from neighboring communities revitalized the parish.

Over the years, the church underwent significant improvements. In 1966, electricity was installed, funded by a local farmer. The original candle chandelier was electrified in 1969. Rotting windows were replaced in 1972 with materials donated by an Edmonton construction company. Natural gas was brought to the hall in 1977 and extended to the church in 1978 through a visitor's generous efforts. The 75th anniversary of the church was celebrated on October 14, 1979, with a liturgy officiated by Reverends Kubin, Shcherban, and Bishop Andrew. It was attended by 230 people.

In 1993, a new foundation was installed with the help of a government grant. The church was painted the following year, and a fence was erected around the property in 1995. The 90th anniversary celebration in 1997 included a hierarchical liturgy officiated by Archbishop John and other clergy, attended by 170 people.

Saint Mary's features a tripartite design with a hipped roof and three domes. The interior includes an iconostasis adorned with both printed and unique painted icons. Notable works include an undated depiction of Saint Mary the Protectress by Peter Lipinski and a 1911 icon of Saint Barbara, adorned with traditional beads and Austro-Hungarian coins. The church's plashchanytsia, brought by a pioneer, has been preserved along with other original features. Practical updates, such as a new wooden floor and a furnace, have modernized the building. The exterior was later clad in vinyl siding.

Adjacent to the church is a distinctive bell tower. It features a square ground floor transitioning to an octagonal second story through tetrahedron-shaped sails. Originally, it had porthole openings, which were replaced with louvers in 2005 to improve the resonance of the bells. A parish hall, located between the church and cemetery, supports community activities.



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Priests

Ioan Puchalsky (1913–1918)
Gregory Soroka (1918–1921)
Ivan Chrustawka (1921–1926)
Vasili Woytowich (1932–1937)
Hryhori Wasyliv (1936–1943)
Mykhailo Cependa (1937–1958)
P. Satsevich (1951–1961)
J. Plewa (1995–2003)
B. Ambrosie (2003 –)

Cemetery

Established in 1903, the cemetery is the final resting place for nearly 700 individuals, including Todor Billey, who built the church. Many early graves were unmarked or lost due to fires. The cemetery was enclosed with a fence in 2005.

Location and Feast Day

East of Smoky Lake, 3/4 mile north of Highway 28 on the east side of Range Road 162, at SW 26-59-16, County of Smoky Lake.

GPS Coordinates: 54.127093, -112.300339
Their *Feast Day* is October 14.

Founding Members

Trustees:

- Wasyl Chipiniuk
- Nykolay Rosychuk
- George Wolansky

Contributors:

- Hawrylo Billey
- Simeon Bozniak
- Nick Fedorak
- Wasyl Franchuk
- George Melnyk

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