

56. Sachava

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of St. John of Sachava

Often spelled *Suchava*, this community derives its name from a river and city (*Suceava* in Romanian) in southern Bukovyna, a historically significant region with strong Ukrainian ties. The Ukrainian Orthodox faithful of the Suchava district proudly claim the distinction of forming the first Alberta congregation of the newly established Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOCC).

The roots of the Suchava Orthodox community trace back to 1900-1904 when Russian Orthodox missionaries, based in Wostok (eleven miles west), began ministering to homesteaders in the area south of the present-day village of Andrew. In 1904, Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco secured title to 40 acres at NW 9-56-16 W4, where a log church dedicated to St. Michael was built, likely under the leadership of Stefan Gudsovaty or Alexander Bochanetsky. This church was served by various Russian Orthodox clergy until it was destroyed by fire in 1913 or 1914.

Following the fire, Bishop Tikhon personally visited the congregation, encouraging them to rebuild. Financial aid from the American Diocese helped construct a new St. Michael's Church and a residence for a full-time priest, completed by 1915. On May 23, 1916, Archbishop Evdokim (Meshchersky) of the Aleutians and North America established a hermitage at Suchava in honor of the patron of Bukovyna, St. John of Suchava. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy with all Russian Orthodox clergy in Alberta, marking the area's significance in Orthodox history.

Throughout the Great War, St. Michael's was served by Rev. Nikon Nikulsky and Rev. Afansiy Markowich, though regular pastoral care remained inconsistent. Following Rev. Markowich's departure in early 1919, the church



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was left without a full-time priest, which, combined with awareness of Ukrainian Orthodox developments in Saskatoon, fostered a pro-Ukrainian movement within the congregation.

Transition to the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada

Encouraged by Dmytro Tokaryk and other members of the *Sachava hromada*, a request was sent to the Ukrainian Orthodox Brotherhood in Saskatoon to supply a priest. On March 22, 1920, the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of St. John of Suchava was formally organized in anticipation of the arrival of Rev. Dmytro Stratychuk, one of the first ordained clergy of the UGOCC.

Rev. Stratychuk arrived in the settlement by sleigh, accompanied by his wife, and was deeply moved when three elderly homesteaders welcomed him with the traditional offering of bread and salt. On March 28, 1920 (Palm Sunday), he celebrated the first Orthodox Liturgy in Alberta sung in Ukrainian, drawing a large crowd. Reflecting on this landmark event in *Ridna Nyva* eighteen years later, he noted: *"I sensed that I was still lacking experience in the service and preaching, but I saw spiritual enthusiasm among those present."*

On July 7, 1920, a mission service was conducted at St. Michael's Church by Rev. Drs. Lazar Gherman and Kopachuk, alongside Rev. Stratychuk. They blessed ritual water and held a prayer service for Ukrainian soldiers who had fallen in the recent European wars. The mission, attended by a large crowd, was reported in *Ukrains'kyi Holos* (August 11, 1920).

Although Rev. Stratychuk initially committed to one year of service in Suchava, his tenure was brief. By late 1920, Rev. Ivan Kusey took over, dedicating himself to strengthening the UGOC in east-central

Alberta. He also established a *Prosvita* society and worked to raise national consciousness among the district's Bukovynian settlers.

Conflict with the Russian Orthodox Mission

The transition to Ukrainian Orthodoxy faced resistance from long-time parishioners loyal to the Russian mission. Tensions escalated on May 6, 1921 (St. George's Day), when three Russian priests—Revs. A. Kiziu (Edmonton), L. Zubach (Wostok), and P. Dovheiko (Szypenitz)—attempted to remove Rev. Kusey from the altar during a service. A dramatic confrontation unfolded as a Russian supporter entered with a steel object, raising fears of violence. However, local leader Dmytro Tokaryk intervened, diffusing the situation. The Russian clergy, embarrassed by the failed takeover, left without further incident.

In 1923, the Russian Orthodox Church formally demanded that Rev. Kusey vacate St. Michael's Church and its rectory, prompting a legal battle. A court case was filed in Edmonton in early 1924 (*Edmonton Bulletin*, February 16, 1924). Anticipating an unfavorable ruling, UGOC supporters decided to construct their own church. Elia Hotzman donated two acres opposite St. Michael's for a Ukrainian Orthodox sanctuary, while Alex Bochanesky provided a house to serve as a temporary place of worship. The first service in this adapted structure was held in June 1924.

By 1925, the congregation secured an additional two-acre grant from the *Sachava Ukrainian National Home* for a cemetery. The first burial was that of Vasyl Bochanesky

Construction of St. John of Suchava Church

Discussions about a permanent church were contentious, with some advocating for construction in Andrew instead of Suchava.

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After intense debate, a June 10, 1934 vote resulted in a 13-7 decision to build at Suchava, adjacent to the cemetery. Despite economic hardships during the Great Depression, construction began immediately.

The completed cruciform church featured:

- A large central dome flanked by two smaller cupolas over the narthex and sanctuary.
- A storm porch at the entrance for protection against the elements.
- A bell stand positioned near the southwest corner of the churchyard.

On May 19, 1935, Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich formally consecrated St. John of Suchava Ukrainian Orthodox Church during his first visit to the parish.

Priests

N. Nikulsky and
A. Markowich (ROC, 1914–1918)
D. Stratychuk (UOC, 1920)
I. Kusey (UOC, 1920–1924)
I. Mayba (1928–1932)
T. Horbay (1933–1938)
I. Hykawy (1938–1940)
S. Symchych (1940–1944)

Cemetery

Located adjacent to the church, donated in 1925 by the Free Ukraine Association.

Decline and Legacy

Despite early tensions, the establishment of St. John of Suchava Church paved the way for a vibrant cultural and religious community. In November 1936, parish activists initiated plans for a second church in Andrew, leading to the construction of Sts. Peter and Paul Church three years later.

By 1944, due to rural depopulation, the Suchava manse was closed, and Rev. Stefan Symchych relocated to Willingdon. As migration patterns changed, membership in rural churches declined, yet the legacy of St. John's as a foundational UGOCC parish remains significant.

Location and Feast Day

Four miles south of Andrew, on the west side of Secondary Highway 855, and four miles north of Secondary Highway 637, at NE 8-56-16 W4. *GPS Coordinates: 53.830292, -112.332104*
Their *Feast Day* is November 21.

Founding Members

W. Frunchak	G. Tanasiuk
D. Tokaryk	N. Tanasiuk
A. Bochanesky	W. Yaremie
E. Hotzman	G. Zukiwsky
W. Latchuk	



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