

66. Zawale

Saint Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The Orthodox presence in the Zawale area dates back to the early development of Ukrainian settlements in the Star-Wostok region northeast of Edmonton. The district was settled by immigrants from Zavallia, a village in the Sniatyn region of Austro-Hungarian Ukraine. As the Ukrainian settlement expanded, competition arose between Orthodox and Catholic missionaries seeking to establish their influence. This rivalry was further intensified by the establishment of the Independent Greek Church in Winnipeg in 1903, which sought to attract followers among Ukrainian settlers in Western Canada.

In late 1903, the Zawale district was visited by Independent Church founders John Bodrug and Alexander Bachynsky, accompanied by Peter Svarich, whom Bodrug hoped to recruit as a fellow clergyman. The first Independent Church service in Alberta took place in the home of Wasyl Hnidan, drawing settlers from the surrounding area. This event marked a significant moment in the religious life of Ukrainians in the province. The new church was immediately criticized by both the Basilian Fathers in Mundare and the Russian Orthodox missionaries in Wostok, adding to the religious tensions in the community.

Following the liturgy, Bodrug and Bachynsky baptized children, performed marriages, and led discussions on forming an Independent Church congregation in Zawale. A second service was held at the Cherniawsky homestead in the Sich-Kolomea district east of Mundare. Soon after, Bishop Seraphim Ustvoltsky, a defrocked Russian Orthodox monk and leader of the Independent Greek Church, visited the region and ordained four



All these photographs of St. Michael's were taken at the camp Bar-V-Nok location.





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local men as Independent clergy despite their lack of formal training.

On August 2, 1904, the newly formed congregation, identified as the Independent Greek Church of Wostok, acquired two acres of land at SE 26-55-17 W4 for \$300 from the homestead of Jan Bruchal. This site appears to have been used as a cemetery, with at least five burials recorded. In 1905, a new congregation named St. George Church of Wostok obtained six acres at SW 1-56-17 W4. In 1910, the Zawale congregation built its first church on this property, which was consecrated by Rev. Illia Glowa.

Religious Transformations and Conflicts

During its early years, the Independent Greek Church underwent numerous upheavals, including the removal of Bishop Seraphim and leadership disputes. In 1913, Zawale and other Independent congregations joined the Presbyterian Church of Canada, which pushed for reforms eliminating Byzantine rituals. This led to widespread defections from the Independent Church, as many members had originally believed it to be an Orthodox formation.

In Zawale, Pastor M. Hutney attempted to implement Protestant reforms in 1917, sparking resistance from traditionalists who opposed abandoning Eastern Rite practices. A contemporary report from *Ranok* (April 11, 1917) indicated that, despite successful reform efforts, some members clung to their "grandfatherly faith" and resisted the changes. This internal conflict divided the congregation, leading to the withdrawal of many members.

Pastor Hutney was replaced later in 1917, and the congregation struggled to maintain its identity. Legal battles followed, including a 1920 lawsuit filed by Pastor Zalizniak against pro-Orthodox members for libel. This period of

instability culminated in a 1925 lawsuit over church ownership. Archbishop Ioan Theodorovich visited Zawale that year to support the Orthodox faction, but a district court ruling in 1926 awarded the property to the Independent Church.

A year later, the church was destroyed in a fire. Rather than rebuilding, the remaining Independent Church members shifted their focus to Andrew, where the Bissell Memorial United Church was established in 1936. Meanwhile, ownership of the Zawale cemetery and land at SW 1-56-17 W4 was transferred to the United Church of Canada in 1931.

Establishment of St. Michael's Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Following their legal defeat, the Orthodox supporters of Zawale resolved to build their own church. At a meeting on November 29, 1929, fundraising efforts began, including the purchase of a car for a raffle. On December 28, approximately one acre of land was purchased from Adolph Hennig at NW 36-55-17 W4. Construction began immediately under the supervision of Steve Hrudey, using materials hauled by Wasyl Nikiforuk.

By the spring of 1930, the cruciform wooden church was nearly complete, featuring a large central dome and two smaller domes over the narthex and sanctuary. The first liturgy was likely celebrated by Fr. Teodor Kisiliuk on June 7, 1930, and the church was formally blessed on November 21, 1931.

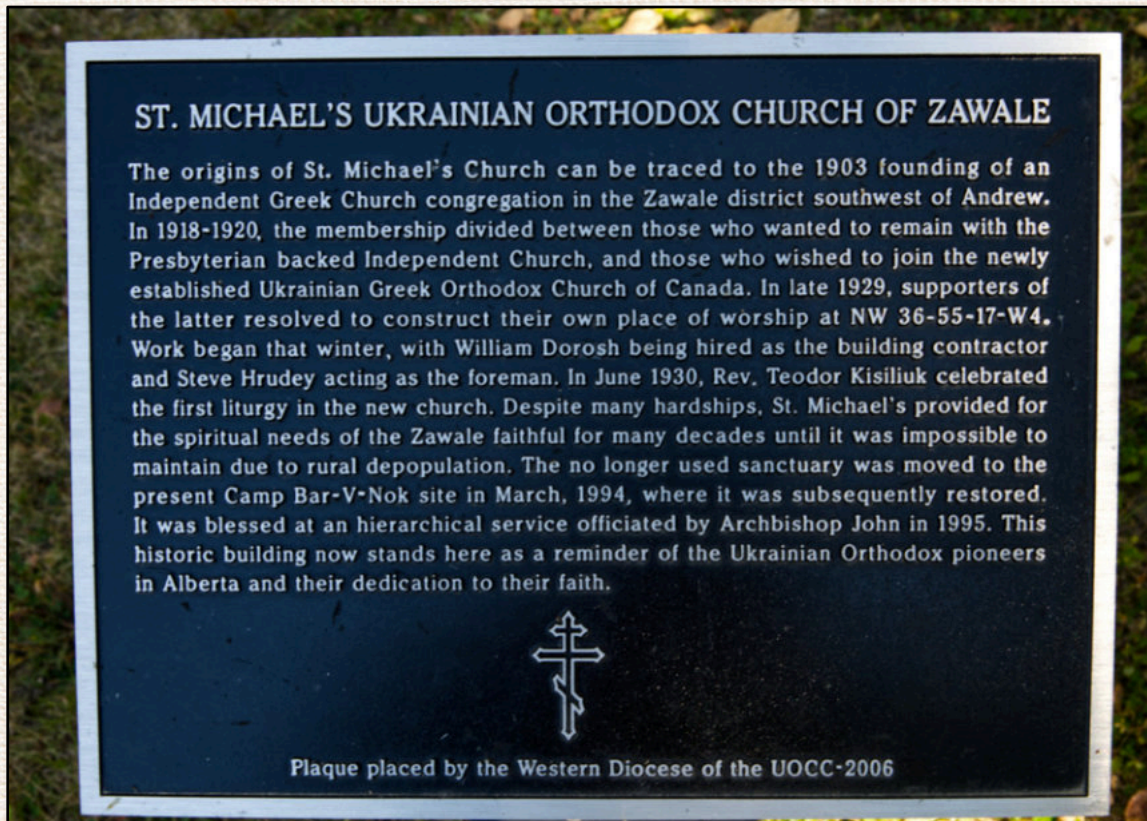
Despite its successful construction, financial difficulties persisted. Disputes arose with contractor William Dorosh over construction quality, leading to a lawsuit in 1932. The court ruled in favor of Dorosh but awarded the congregation damages for needed repairs. Further financial troubles followed, including unpaid debts and legal claims throughout the 1930s.

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Later Years and Relocation

From the 1940s through the early 1960s, St. Michael's held regular liturgies despite declining membership. By 1953, the congregation had only eight members, and by the mid-1970s, just four parishioners remained. The church eventually closed, and the building stood abandoned for years, suffering damage from the elements.

In 1993, the decision was made to relocate the church to Camp Bar-V-Nok on Pigeon Lake. The move took place in March 1994, followed by extensive restoration. Archbishop John officiated at a hierarchical blessing service in 1995. A commemorative plaque was installed at the new site in 2006, ensuring the legacy of Zawale's Ukrainian Orthodox pioneers endures.



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Priests

Independent Church:

P. Woycenko
Demian Witiuk (-1917)
M. Hutney (1917)
T. Berezowsky
A.M. Zalizniak (1919)

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada:

T. Kisiliuk (1929–1933)
D. Stratyчук (c. 1932–1933)
T. Horbay (1933–1938)
I. Hykawy (1938–1940)
S. Symchych (1940–1944)
M. Fyk (1944–1945)
H. Wasyliv (1945–1950)
I. Triska (1950–1954)
D. Luchak (1954–1957)
S. Stolarchuk (1957–1963)
I. Hykawy (1963–1969)
O. Olekshy (1969–1971)
P. Hnatiw (1971–1974)
S. Semotiuk (1974–1977)

Cemetery

Located at SW 1-56-17 W4, across from the original church site. It was jointly used by Orthodox and Protestant members after the Orthodox group separated from the Independent Church. The cemetery is now administered by the Bissell Memorial United Church in Andrew.

Original cemetery GPS: 53.803568, -112.400224

Location and Feast Day

Originally located southwest of Andrew, north of Secondary Highway 637, and east of Secondary Highway 855 at NW 36-55-17 W4, County of Lamont.

In 1994, the church was relocated to Camp Bar-V-Nok, a Ukrainian Orthodox Church-owned site on Pigeon Lake, south of Thorsby. It has since been restored and continues to serve as a sanctuary for the camp. *GPS Coordinates:* 53.055590, -114.059959 | Their *Feast Day* was November 21.

Founding Members

I. Hnidan
O. Hunka
P. Lakusta
T. Lakusta
O. Matichuk
D. Nikiforuk
W. Nikiforuk
S. Sorochan

