

Project Report for 2025-26

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



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Pioneer Churches on the Prairies | Steppingstones Partnership Inc.
Musica Ukraina: Ukrainian Music Museum

Edmonton, Alberta

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1. Introduction

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing initiative to record, document and share information about the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The earliest immigrants arrived in the late 1890s, and continued to settle for decades afterwards. Due to declining rural populations, fewer members, and increasing costs, many of these parishes are closing. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these historic churches that played such an important role in the lives of these pioneers.

The project objectives are to:

1. Capture, record and preserve high-quality, high-dynamic-range photographs and videos of these historic churches and their cemeteries. This is being done using the advanced technology of DJI drones and Nikon cameras. All images are shot in RAW for best quality and ease of processing. For each photo, the drones and cameras record metadata such as GPS location, date, time, camera settings etc.
2. Research, record and preserve available historical information about each parish and its cemetery. In addition to providing photographs and videos of cemeteries, we are collaborating with <https://findagrave.com> to post our photos on their website. We also provide a link to the cemetery listed on *Find a Grave* website for a list of people that are buried there.
3. Find, digitize and share music and other audio relevant to this project. We have developed a comprehensive process to digitize and re-master old recordings of sacred, festive, and traditional Ukrainian music. The sacred music is often used as a background for the church videos. The digitized Ukrainian music has its own website at <https://musica-ukraina.ca>
4. Share, promote and inform the general public and our members about these important historic churches. This is being done by a dedicated website – <https://pioneerchurches.ca> that has extensive photographs, videos, histories, and cemetery information.
5. Ensure that this history of our pioneer churches is not forgotten, and will continue to be available for future generations. ALL of the resources developed by this project, including all of the images (original and edited), videos, histories and music are being made freely available, and without any restrictions, to sustainable organizations/institutions to preserve and share them in the future. (See page 12 for details.)



2. Project Components

2.1 Pioneer Churches website

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* website is the primary method for recording and sharing the images and histories of these historic churches. This site at <https://pioneerchurches.ca> consists of the following components:

- Welcome page with a bulletin board and subscription form for our mailing list.
- A page for each of the 132 churches consisting of:
 - A video or photograph of that church
 - A short (or longer) history of the parish
 - Photograph of the cemetery (if applicable)
 - Link to the cemetery page on the *Findagrave.com* website
 - Audio recordings of the appropriate *Memory Eternal* chant
 - Live GPS links to Google maps for the church and cemetery locations
 - The affiliation of the church (UOC, UCC, OCA, RGO, Other).
- Photo galleries for each church categorized by denomination (4,800+ total photos).
- Resources section containing: a) articles on parish security, disaster planning and more; b) clergy lists and contact information; c) links to other related websites and resources; and d) credits including audio recordings of music used for the videos.
- Contact form for inquires, comments and suggestions.
- Sections on *About Us*, *Our Purpose*, *Terms of Use*, *Technology Tools* and a link to our videos on Vimeo.

2.2 Musica Ukraina website

The *Music Library* was moved in 2024 from *Pioneer Churches* its own website at <https://Musica-Ukraina.ca> (The following domain names have also been redirected to this site – *MusicaUkraina.ca*, *UkrainianMusic.ca*, and *Ukrainian-Music.ca*). This site consists of the following components:

- Welcome page with information about the website.
- Tabs for the different types of music and other resources:
 - Sacred and religious (26 albums)
 - Festive and seasonal (7 albums)
 - Traditional Ukrainian (23 albums)
 - Contemporary Ukrainian (29 albums)
 - Oldies – Early Ukrainian Records
 - Other collections of Ukrainian music
 - Resources – Links to other Ukrainian music websites and resources
- Received donation of approximately 100 “priceless” Ukrainian 78s records (1913 to 1952)



- Purchased and received donations of Ukrainian LPs and tape cassettes; have over 1,000 LP records and over 300 cassettes available for digitization.
- Received donations of Ukrainian LPs from the Basilian Brothers Museum in Mundare, as well as from several private collections.
- Invested in professional recording/playback devices, ultrasonic cleaning equipment, and software to enable best quality digitization and restoration.

Our particular interest is to collect and digitize sacred music from various local church choirs. In this way, we will also be able to preserve not only the images of these historic churches, but their music as well.

2.3 UOCC history repository and database website

This website was developed, and is being hosted and managed, by Steppingstones. It was created to compile, preserve and share the histories and images of Ukrainian Orthodox Churches, their clergy and cemeteries in Canada from about 1898 to 2000. For various reasons, many of these churches have closed, or are at risk of closure. Therefore, it is critical that we document their stories and memories before they fade away.

This information will be used by interested individuals and organizations to “package” and distribute these memories and knowledge via websites, books, articles, videos and other media.

The repository (library) component consists of digital folders that have been created for each known UOCC parish that existed in Canada. Photographs, images, histories and other data on each parish are being uploaded to their relevant folder. This data can then be accessed by various stakeholders and users.

The library consists of the following folders:

- Alberta (90 parishes)
- British Columbia (13 parishes)
- Ontario (29 parishes)
- Manitoba (72 parishes)
- Quebec (3 parishes)
- Saskatchewan (118 parishes)

Data has been entered into a considerable number of folders for Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Research and data entry is ongoing.

The database component has forms to collect, manage and report on the following types of data.

- UOC parishes (N = 321)
- UOC clergy (N = 266)
- UOC cemeteries (N = 59 – AB only for now)

Having the UOC historical information in database tables allows for better analysis, searching and reporting. One of the intents of this project was to have a single source of reliable and agreed-upon data for the various ongoing Ukrainian Orthodox church history projects.

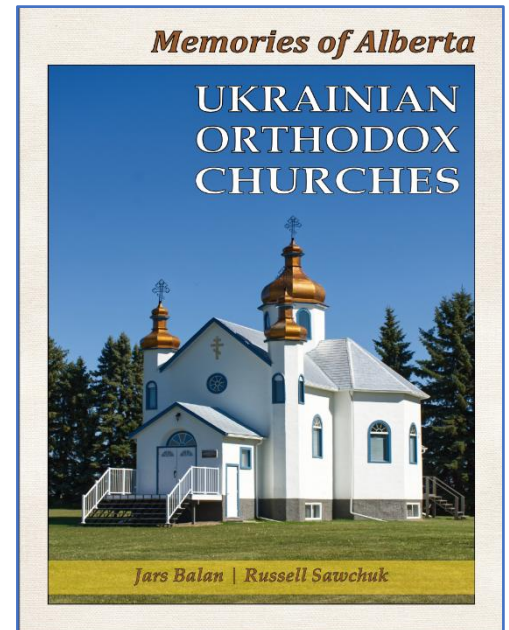
This website is publicly available at <https://uocdocs.ca>

2.4 Memories of Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in Alberta book

This component was added to ensure that the detailed histories of UOC parishes in Alberta are preserved and made available for future generations.

This “book” consists of the following components:

- Detailed histories of 66 Alberta Ukrainian Orthodox churches researched and documented by Jars Balan.
- Multiple color photographs (300+) from the *Pioneer Churches* collection and images provided by other photographers for each church/cemetery.
- Supplementary information about the founding members, clergy that served, cemetery information and location descriptions.
- The “book” will be available as an interactive PDF document, an eBook and hard-cover print versions.
- A few of the churches in this book still need to have their drone photos taken.



The various versions of the Book should be available by the end of October 2026. The DRAFT PDF and eBook versions are at <https://pioneerchurches.ca/index.php/resources/ab-histories>

The Shevchenko Foundation has approved funding for 2026 to help cover partial costs of printing this book.

2.5 Canvas prints

Because the digital images are taken at high-resolution and high-dynamic-range (HDR), the printed photographs show exceptional detail and exhibit vibrant colors. We print many of the historic church photographs on large (24 x 36 inch) and medium (16 x 24 inch) format canvas prints.

Once the canvas prints are received, they are further enhanced by adding a solid black foam core back. The prints are then treated with 2 to 3 coats of archival preservative that should extend their lifetime to about 200 years.

A label indicating the name of the church, when it was founded, the date the photograph was taken, the name of the photographer, and the GPS co-ordinates of the location, is affixed to the back of the print.

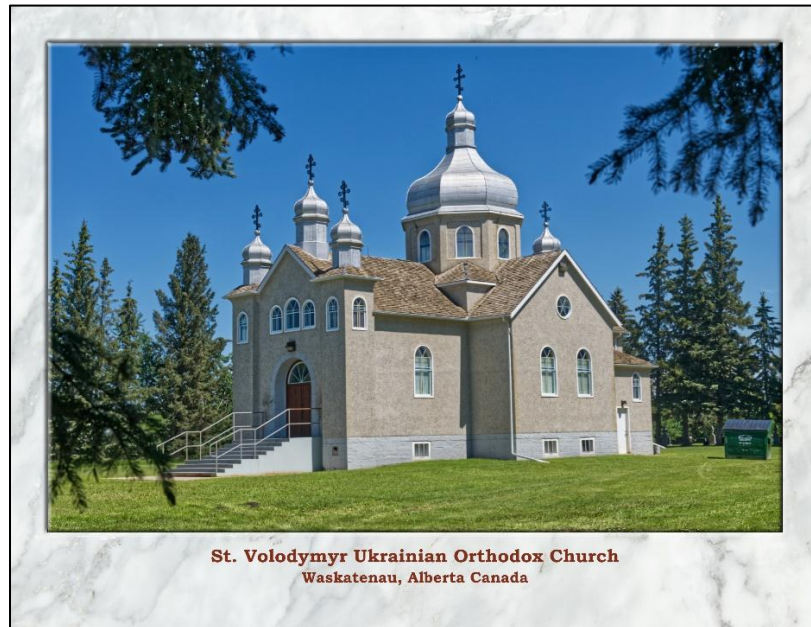
These photographs are used in our exhibits; are donated to clergy, parishes and museums; and sold to interested individuals.

2.6 Photographs

Not everyone wants, or has room for, the large canvas prints. Therefore, we print 8.5 x 11-inch and 11 x 14 -inch photographs of many of the historic churches on photographic paper. These are attached to black foam core board and/or framed. A label with all of the same information as the canvas prints, is affixed to the back.

In addition to individual photos, these images are also used to create poster boards with six photographs. Usually, posters contain churches from the same denomination. (*See poster below*).

These individual photos and the poster boards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parish and museum gift shops; and sold to the public.

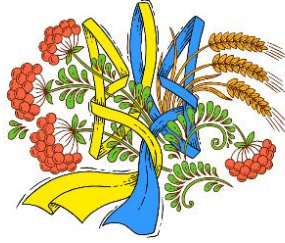


2.7 Cards

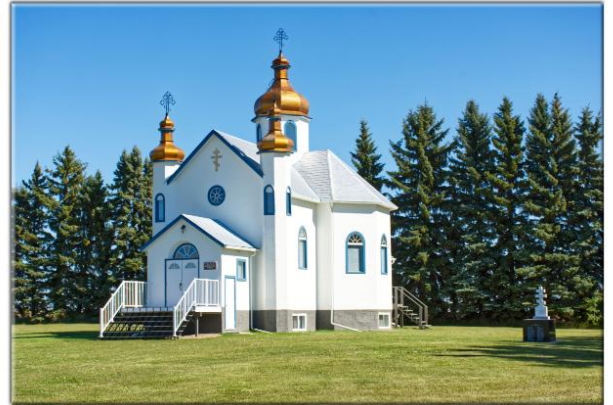
The *Pioneer Churches* photos are used to create individual cards of the various churches. These cards contain a high-quality photograph of the church on the front, and the appropriate information on the back.

These cards are used in our exhibits; are donated to parishes and museum gift shops; and sold individually, or as a package.

Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Kahwin, Alberta CANADA
Founded in 1932
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada
GPS Co-ordinates: 53.983992,-112.281533
PioneerChurches.ca



St. John's Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Egremont, Alberta CANADA
Founded in 1939
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada
GPS Co-ordinates: 54.071060,-113.150709
PioneerChurches.ca



3. Churches Photographed in 2025

Some thirty (30) historic churches were photographed in 2025. All of these were added to the *Pioneer Churches* website along with their histories and links to cemeteries. Some 20 to 50 photographs of each church were added to their respective Photo Galleries.

The following seventeen (17) *Ukrainian Orthodox Churches*, that already had pages on the website, were photographed in 2025.

- *Athabasca* – Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Big Meadow* – St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Bonnyville* – St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Craigend* – St. Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Elk Point* – St. Volodymyr Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Gifford* – Sts. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Glendon* – Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Innisfree* – St. John Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Lac La Biche* – All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Newbrook* – St. Mary Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Noral* – St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Richmond Park* – Holy Trinity Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Sandy Rapids* – All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Slawa (North)* – All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Smoky Lake* – Holy Ascension Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *St. Paul* – All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox Church
- *Wandering River* – St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The following thirteen (13) *Ukrainian Catholic Churches* were photographed and added to the website.

- *Angle Lake* – St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Bonnyville* – Holy Spirit Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Buchach* – St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Carvel* – St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Craigend* – St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Darling* – Holy Spirit Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Derwent* – Holy Spirit Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Elk Point* – Holy Eucharist Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Innisfree* – St. Josaphat Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Manly* – St. George Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *New Pine Creek* – St. Anthony Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *Smoky Lake (Town)* – St. Volodymyr and Olga Ukrainian Catholic Church
- *St. Paul* – St. Mary Ukrainian Catholic Church

St. Andrew Roman Catholic Church at *Clandonald* was also photographed and added to the site.

4. Exhibits

Selected large canvas prints, framed photographs and cards of historic churches in our collection were exhibited at the following events.

Ukrainian Pysanka Festival at Vegreville, Alberta July 4 – 6, 2025



St. Anthony's Ukrainian Orthodox Parish – Edmonton, AB

In September 2025, the Council of *St. Anthony's Ukrainian Orthodox Parish* in Edmonton gave their approval and blessing for the installation of a *permanent* photo gallery in their church basement.

The gallery consists of large canvas prints of 32 historic, and mostly rural, Ukrainian Orthodox churches in northeastern Alberta. The regular and drone photographs were contributed by the *Pioneer Churches* project. Funding support was generously provided by the SUS Foundation and St. John's Legacy Foundation.



Other Gallery Prospects

Color photographs of 17 UOCC churches in the St. Paul district were donated to *All Saints Ukrainian Orthodox parish* in St. Paul, Alberta. These photographs will be framed and displayed in their church hall.

Discussions were held with the Curator of the *Basilian Brothers Museum* in Mundare, Alberta. An agreement was made to have an exhibit of our Ukrainian Catholic Churches photographs. The exhibit will launch in September 2026 and run for one year. Then the photographs will then become part of the Museum's permanent collection for possible future exhibits. See <https://basilianmuseum.ca/>

5. Marketing and Promotion

The following activities and events were undertaken to make stakeholders, interested parties, and the general public aware of the *Pioneer Churches* and *Musica Ukraina* websites, exhibits, photographs and cards.

Ads – Purchased a full-page ad for one year about *Pioneer Churches* in *Promin* Magazine; purchased a one-page color ad for the Winter 2024-2025 edition of the *ACUAVITAE* magazine.

Canadian Orthodox History Project – This website has parish-submitted listings, descriptions and histories of Orthodox Churches in Canada. We noticed that some of our *Pioneer Churches* photos have been added to several of the parishes on that website.

Cards – Had free church cards available at all of our exhibits and events; several hundred cards have been distributed.

Flyers – Prepared a one page-flyer on the *Pioneer Churches* project. These have been posted and are available at *St. Anthony's Parish*, *St. John's Parish*, and *Ukrainian Museum of Canada (Alberta Branch)* and the *Basilian Brothers Museum* in Mundare. Flyers are also available at all of our exhibits.

Links – The following websites have links to our *PioneerChurches.ca* website: *Alberta Family Histories Society*, various *Facebook* pages, *County of Lamont*, *Ukrainian Canadian Genealogy*, *Ukrainian Museum of Canada (Alberta Branch)*, and *Ukrainian Musicians Association*.

Mailouts – We continue to sent out short updates on the *Pioneer Churches* project to two lists. The first was to the *Alberta Museums Association* members list (approximately 1,000). The second mailing was to our own compiled mailing list of about 170 individuals. These included clergy, members from various parishes, artists, photographers, government officials and selected museums.

Memberships – We are paid-up members of *Alberta Museums Association (AMA)*, *Alberta Council for the Ukrainian Arts (ACUA)*, *Ukrainian Museum of Canada*, and the *Drone Pilots Association of Canada (DPAC)*.

Merchandise – Cards, photos and canvas prints are available to purchase at *St. Anthony's Parish Gift Shop*, the *Ukrainian Museum of Canada (Alberta Branch)*, and the *Romanian Orthodox Parish at Boian* (for fundraising to replace their church that burned on June 6, 2023). These items are also available at ACUA.

Museums – Permanent display of several Pioneer Church photos are at the *Ukrainian Museum of Canada (Alberta Branch)* in Edmonton Alberta. Smaller photographs of Ukrainian Catholic churches were donated to the *Ukrainian Catholic Women's League Museum* in Edmonton.

Vimeo – All of our videos are hosted on our account with Vimeo (similar to YouTube, but NO ads). The videos are public, thereby allowing anyone to view our collection of historic church videos. See: <https://vimeo.com/channels/pioneerchurches>

Websites – Our most powerful and successful marketing and promotional tool are our websites and their growing numbers of visitors. See Stats below.

PioneerChurches.ca

- 2023: Unique visitors=9,800 | visits=15,000 | pages viewed=222,000
- 2024: Unique visitors=33,600 | visits=70,000 | pages viewed=301,000
- 2025: Unique visitors=92,400 | visits=138,300 | pages viewed=462,600

Musica-Ukraina.ca

- Jun-Dec 2024: Unique visitors=6,100 | visits=8,700 | pages viewed=86,800
- 2025: Unique visitors=21,200 | visits=34,800 | pages viewed=222,800

6. Leaving a Legacy

As indicated earlier, one of the important objectives of this initiative is to ensure that the photographic and histories of our pioneer churches are not forgotten, and that they will be preserved and continue to be shared and available for many future generations.

Here is what has been done so far to achieve this objective:

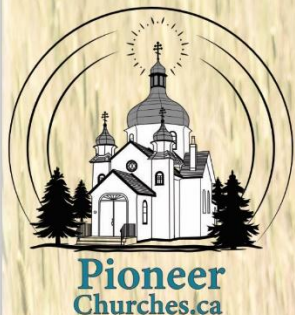
1. *FindaGrave website*: The <https://Findagrave.com> website is a comprehensive world-wide database of cemeteries. This website has information and burials lists for the parishes on the *Pioneer Churches* website. Cemeteries listed on our parish webpages have links to the cemeteries on *Findagrave.com*. We also contribute 3 to 4 of our church/cemetery photos to each of their cemetery listings. We also added the *St. Peter and Paul Ukrainian Orthodox* cemetery at Onoway to this website.
2. *Ukrainian Orthodox church gallery*: As described above, St. Anthony's Ukrainian Orthodox Parish in Edmonton now houses a "permanent" gallery of large canvas prints of 32 UOC churches from northern Alberta.
3. *Ukrainian Catholic church gallery*: The Basilian Brothers Museum in Mundare has agreed to display and permanently house the canvas prints (currently 42) of Ukrainian Catholic churches. A copy of all photographic files of UCC churches will be provided to them for safekeeping and potential future research and exhibits.
4. *Edmonton Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy*: Permission has been granted to the Edmonton Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy to use Pioneer Churches UCC photos for their new website. Also, a copy of all UCC photo files will be provided to them for their archives.
5. *Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada / Western Eparchy*: Copies of photo files of UOC churches and cemeteries will be provided to these organizations' archives.
6. *SUCH: (Sustainable Ukrainian Canadian Heritage)*. SUCH is a multifaceted research and education program of the *Kule Folklore Centre* (University of Alberta) supported by the Peter Arabchuk Endowment Fund. SUCH has added all of the *Pioneer Churches* photos to their collections database. See <https://suchnetwork.ca/pioneer-churches-on-the-prairies-2>
7. *HeRMIS: Heritage Resources Management Information System*: We are working with Alberta Heritage Resources Branch to contribute Pioneer Churches photos and data to their historic sites database. Currently this database has 42 Ukrainian Orthodox and 83 Ukrainian Catholic Churches listed. Most of these listings do NOT have any photographs. A few that do, the photos are black and white digitized from negatives. So, the addition of our high-quality colour photos to this collection will be enhance it, and preserve their images for the future. See <https://hermis.alberta.ca/ARHP/>
8. *Alberta Archives*: An agreement has been reached with Alberta Archives to take, house and make available all current (23,600 images) and future Pioneer Churches project digital image files.
9. *Memories of Ukrainian Orthodox Churches in Alberta book*: This book has histories and 300+ photos of 66 UOC parishes. Several hundred copies will be printed and widely distributed, including to libraries, universities, clergy, parishes and other religious organizations.

Distribution of our book, canvas prints, digital images and histories of pioneer churches and their cemeteries to interested individuals and organizations will ensure that this important information will be preserved, available and shared for many generations to come. May memories of these historic pioneer churches be eternal!

7. Appendices

7.1 Pioneer Churches Flyer / Brochure

Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to settle for decades afterwards.

So far, the project has recorded 118 churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful and historic churches. Our dedicated project *Pioneer Churches* website has:

- Drone and regular high-resolution photographs of the churches and cemeteries
- Short descriptions and histories of the parishes and cemeteries
- Links to a cemetery website with listings of burials and information on the deceased
- Photo galleries with 3,675 images of 100 different churches and cemeteries
- Over 100 videos and video tours of most of the historic churches
- Digitized sacred, festive, traditional and folk Ukrainian music at *Musica-Ukraina.ca*
- Large canvas prints, framed photographs and cards of these churches are available.



Visit: PioneerChurches.ca

Financial support provided by:
St. John's Legacy Foundation and
SUS Foundation of Canada





Pioneer Churches on the Prairies



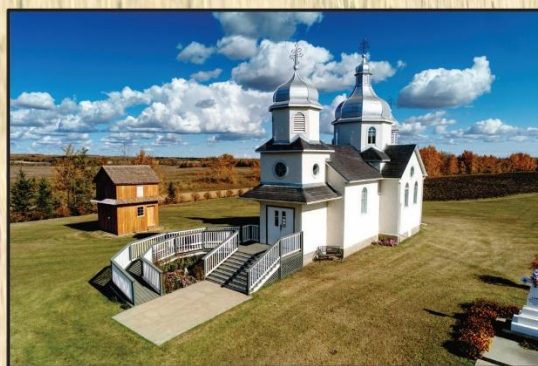
Pioneer
Churches.ca

The *Pioneer Churches on the Prairies* is an ongoing project to record and document the historic churches established by early settlers in northeastern Alberta. The first immigrants arrived in the late 1890s and continued to settle for decades afterwards. So far, the project has recorded 92 churches and their cemeteries from six different denominations. Time is running out to capture and preserve the memories of these beautiful historic churches.

Our dedicated project website has: High-resolution photos of each church and cemetery; descriptions and histories of the parishes and their cemeteries; photo galleries with over 3,000 images of 80 different churches and cemeteries; and, over 85 videos and video tours of most of the historic churches.

Visit our website, or join our mailing list, for the latest information on new additions and upcoming exhibits.

Visit: PioneerChurches.ca



Musica Ukraina: Ukrainian Music Museum

Music was an important and integral part of the culture and lives of Ukrainian Canadian pioneers. The last century has seen the formation of hundreds of choirs and smaller vocal groups, dance and polka bands, and countless solo performers. Our digitized recordings are made for the historical preservation of the rich musical heritage of Ukrainian settlers in Canada during the period of 1891 to 2001. This is the music that they performed, wrote, danced and listened to. This music, and information about the many talented performers, must be preserved and made available / accessible to their descendants and future generations. All music tracks were digitally cleaned and enhanced to ensure best possible audio quality. Enjoy listening to this music on our clean, ads-free website.

Visit: MusicaUkraina.ca



Financial support provided by:
St. John's Legacy Foundation and
SUS Foundation of Canada

