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UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX PARISH OF ST. MARY SZYPENITZ DISTRICT



Photo courtesy of Lori Chornik.

A gathering of parishioners outside the community's third church (1920).



Photo courtesy of Lori Chornik.

Original 1918 Szypenitz school with second classroom addition (1940). The school property also had a teacherage and stable.



Photo courtesy of Lori Chornik.

Family from Bukovyna in traditional clothing (1900).

Starting at the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans immigrated to western Canada in search of land and greater opportunity. Among them were Ukrainians from the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Galicia and Bukovyna who claimed homesteads and built new communities in the Prairie West. The largest concentration of Ukrainian settlement in Canada was in east-central Alberta, where a distinctly Ukrainian cultural landscape emerged.

The first Ukrainian families to settle this area arrived around 1900. Many of them had come from the village of Szypenitz and the name was given to this area in memory of their homeland. Ukrainian immigration to the district continued in the early 1900s and, by 1906, there were enough children to establish Szypenitz School District #1470. A small school was built in 1907 and served the community until it closed in 1950. By the mid-1920s, Szypenitz was also home to a post office, blacksmith shop and community hall. The hall was a social hub of the community, hosting meetings, plays, concerts, dances and wedding receptions.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Parish of St. Mary was the heart of this small but thriving community. Three churches were built to serve the parish between 1907 and 1919. The first was a single-room log building constructed in 1907 in the northwest corner of the community's cemetery. This churched burned down in 1909 and a larger, more ornate church was constructed on the opposite side of the cemetery in 1911. The second church was tragically destroyed by fire as well, leading to the construction of the third church on the north side of the cemetery in 1919. The 1919 church was constructed in brick. This was a rarity for early Ukrainian churches in Alberta and reflected the parishioners' determination to build a sturdier, more permanent structure. The church was designed by Hrahori Osetski while its striking interior iconography was written by Peter Lipinski. A wooden bell tower was constructed outside of the church to announce the start of religious services. This beautiful church is a community landmark and strongly reflects the rich cultural and religious traditions brought by Ukrainian settlers to Alberta.



Photo courtesy of Lori Chornik.

Eastern Rite church celebration conducted by Father Ambrose Chrustawka (ca. 1920).



Map produced by Historic Resource Management Branch staff.

Szypentiz district (early 1900s).

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Alberta Government