

Mamornytsya Pioneer Rural Church: A Historical Landmark of the Prairies

Located 10 miles southwest of the town of Buchanan, Saskatchewan, on grid road No. 746 on the NW quarter of S24-T30-R7-W2ndM, stands the Mamornitz Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God. Built in 1910 by Bukovynian immigrants who settled in the area as early as 1897, and built a vibrant community, this rural pioneer church is a historic landmark gracing the Saskatchewan prairie landscape.

The immigrants came mostly from the village of Mamornytsya – hence the name – in the District of Chernivtsi, as well as from other surrounding villages: Toporivtsi, Tsuren, Vashkivtsi, Dobronivtsi, Horoshivtsi. The church was built on five acres of homestead virgin land donated by two pioneers and founding fathers: Ivan and Gafitsa Forstey, giving 3 acres, and Domitrash and Teodosiya Drozdiuk providing 2 acres. The chief carpenter was Pavlo Kudeba of Canora. The Bukovynian church fathers Nykolai Badiuk, Nykolai Bilan, Iliya Bilan, Dmytro Chobotar, Domitrash Drozdiuk, Nykolai Drozdiuk, Ilya Franko, Ivan Forstey, Nykolai Kushneriuk, Dmytro Gulutzun, Ivan Lungul, Vasyl Odowichuk and Nykolai Rusnak had a dream to build a new Canadian “Mamornytsya” in the newly-adopted land of Canada, a new Bukovynian community, with a church, cemetery and a school, which would form the nucleus of their prairie settlement.

The church was built, not along the roadside, as would have been required for the school, but on a hilltop, as was their mother church in Bukovyna, in the middle of the field where the soil was sandy for burial and where the church itself could be seen from every angle, as dictated by tradition. The first grave site dates back to 1905: It was the infant daughter of pioneers Dmytro and Agafiya Gulutzan. The cemetery existed well before the construction of the church and the actual transfer of donated land on March 28, 1910.

The church was built in the traditional shape of a boat, symbolizing the salvation of the people in the sea of life. This simple wooden structure, built of Canadian logs, measuring only 30’x20’, was deeply rooted in the life of its people. The five-acre churchyard, measuring 205 yards by 111 yards, included a separate bell tower, an integral part of the community’s religious heritage, a cemetery, a parish house and a stable. The three brand-new church bells defined the rhythm of community life from birth to death for generations. The church was consecrated on August 28, 1910 on the Feast Day of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God in whose honour it was named. Church membership in 1913 stood at 45 families. In 1916, it increased to 62 members, the largest of the church’s history. It gradually dwindled to the present five families. 31 priests have served the church since its founding.

On August 28, 2010 the parish celebrated 100 years of Ukrainian Orthodox worship. A large crowd of over 450 people came from near and far to celebrate this historic milestone. Its rich 100 year heritage was captured on DVD, specially prepared for the event. For 10 decades the church served the community as a sacred place of worship, a source of spiritual guidance, a centre for the preservation of our culture and traditions and the final resting place of our ancestors. Our Church fathers would hardly have imagined that their little “Canadian Mamornytsya” - a tiny corner of Bukovyna in Canada, would survive for 100 years and play a major role in the community. Despite staggering obstacles, fire, dwindling church membership,

and the exodus of people from the community, this little Bukovynian church, rich in heritage, was never left abandoned in sad decay, nor has it fallen victim to a bulldozer, as was the fate of other pioneer churches in the area. Instead, it remained alive and functioning, mainly due to the abiding faith and spirit of our Bukovynian people. Today, the church bells toll not for their own demise, but as a witness to the cherished legacy left to us by our ancestors.

-Dr Jennie Dutchak, Ottawa, ON