

13. Craigend

Saint Demetrius Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of Saint Demetrius congregation date back to the early years of the Great Depression. On May 11, 1931, approximately 35 Ukrainian settlers, originally from Galicia and Bukovyna, gathered at the home of John and Jennie Palamaruk. They sought to establish a cemetery, as Orthodox Ukrainian burials required permission from local French Catholic residents to use their graveyard. During this meeting, John Palamaruk, Fred Warawa, and John Salahub were selected to acquire land for the cemetery. A total of \$45 was collected in donations. Soon after, a two-acre property adjacent to the French cemetery was purchased from Narcisse L. Mouille.

While registering the cemetery with the provincial government, the organizers decided to affiliate it with the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada. They reached out to the Consistory for documentation, leading to their formal establishment as a congregation.

On January 15, 1933, the congregation was officially named the “Ukrainian Greek Orthodox of Craigend, Alberta.” The original land purchasers were designated as trustees for both the cemetery and the congregation. In April 1933, a letter was sent to the Consistory in Winnipeg requesting admission into the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada. After an exchange of correspondence, a formal meeting took place on February 4, 1934, at John Salahub’s home. Twelve members voted to adopt the church’s statutes. Eight days later, on February 12, 1934, the congregation was formally admitted into the UGOC.





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Early Pastoral Challenges

In the congregation's early years, access to clergy was a major challenge. On May 10, 1933, several families traveled by horse and wagon to the Venice district for the baptism of their children by Fr. Ivan Wachiuk of the Russian Orthodox Church. Concerned about potential Russian influence, a member wrote to the Consistory in April 1934 requesting a priest for Craigend.

Fr. Ivan Mayba responded, celebrating a Divine Liturgy at Craigend School on the Sunday following Pentecost. He also blessed the newly acquired cemetery land. In early 1935, he held another service at the school. Around this time, the congregation decided to construct a small chapel for funerals. However, they later shifted their focus to building a modest church. Despite financial hardships, members cleared land, raised funds through community events, and secured timber permits. By the fall of 1936, the sanctuary was completed. Fr. H. Wasyliw conducted the first service in November, dedicating the church to Saint Demetrius.

Continued Struggles and Growth

Due to Craigend's remote location and limited resources, securing clergy was difficult. In 1937, responsibility for the church shifted from Fr. Wasyliw in Smoky Lake to Fr. Hykawy in Willingdon. On July 4, 1937, a Divine Liturgy was arranged. A member traveled to Lac La Biche to meet Fr. Hykawy at the train station, but due to a scheduling conflict, he did not arrive.

A similar incident occurred in 1939 when Fr. Sawchenko, head of the Consistory, visited Craigend on August 2 to celebrate the Feast of the Prophet Illia. Poor communication meant no one met him at the train station, forcing

him to arrange transportation to Craigend. Despite the challenges, he conducted a Divine Liturgy at Saint Demetrius Church and another service at Ivan Salahub's home. Fr. Sawchenko noted that, while the church was small and unfinished inside, the property and cemetery were well maintained.

In 1940, heavy rains prevented Fr. Wasyliw from reaching Craigend for a scheduled liturgy, highlighting the ongoing challenges posed by primitive roads. These difficulties persisted into the 1940s.

Improvements and Milestones

Despite many hardships, Saint Demetrius congregation gradually improved its facilities. By 1946, a community hall was constructed. In 1950, the parish reported 12 members, though only two liturgies were held that year due to a shortage of priests.

In 1954, the congregation prepared for a visit from Metropolitan Ilarion, who was to consecrate the church and bless the cemetery. Unfortunately, his illness prevented him from attending. Instead, Frs. Kowalishen, Hrycyna, and Zubrytsky led a service, accompanied by the Richmond Park church choir. That year, the congregation hosted 11 services.

In 1959, volunteers expanded the church by adding a sanctuary and renovating the interior. By 1964, the congregation had eight dedicated members. Renovations continued over the years. A new foundation, windows, cedar shingles, and siding were installed in 1986. A monumental cross was erected in 1991, the porch was renovated in 1997, and a new altar was crafted in 1998. These projects reflected the self-reliant spirit of the pioneers and the commitment of current members.

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Priests

- T.M. Kisiliuk (1929-1933)
- T. Horbay (1936-38 – as pastor of nearby St. John of Suchava Church, he undoubtedly would have been consulted on the formation of the congregation)
- I. Hykawy (1938-40)
- S. Symchych (1940-44)
- M. Fyk (1944-45)
- H. Wasyliv (1945-50)
- I. Triska (1950-54)
- D. Luchak (1954-7)
- S. Stolarchuk (1957-63)
- I. Hykawy (1963-69)
- O. Olekshy (1969-71)
- P. Hnatiw (1971-74)
- S. Semotiuk (1974-80)
- S. Soroka (1980-81)
- P. Bodnar (1981-82)
- M. Bawa (1982-84)
- O. Hudema (1985-87)
- J. Puk (1988-1994)
- E. Maximimuk (1997-2003)
- B. Ambrosie (2003 –).

Cemetery

A one acre parcel of land was acquired for a church cemetery in 1925 at NW 28-56-16 W4 on the southern approaches to the town, on the east side of Secondary Highway 855. The earliest burial was that of William Lesick (d. 31 December 1952), the founding president of the church. Several local dignitaries such as the first mayor of Andrew (Tom Matichuk) and the first Justice of the Peace (Gregory Moisey) are interred in the church graveyard.

GPS Coordinates: 54.58761, -111.89659

Location and Feast Day

Southeast of Lac La Biche, at SE 4-65-13 W4, east of Highway 36 and on the south side of Highway 55, Lac La Biche County. *GPS Coordinates:* 54.594211, -111.921945

Founding Members

William Lesick
John Filipchuk
Roman Bratkiw
Steve Lesick



These photos were taken in the 2000's prior to the latest renovations.



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