

7. Borowich / Boriwtzi

Saint Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church

The origins of St. Mary the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Borowich date back to 1902. That year, local homesteaders selected a site for a cemetery. A Dominion land grant (No. 1179) was issued to the Russo-Greek Catholic Orthodox parish of Shandro to establish a church and cemetery for the Borowich district.

In 1903, 35 settlers gathered at Hryhory Kowalchuk's home to plan the construction of a sanctuary. They elected an executive and trustees, securing a 20-acre plot. Since no large trees were available nearby, timber had to be hauled from a forest 20 miles away, north of Andrew.

Construction of the church began in the summer of 1904 under the supervision of Oleksa Morris. Dionysy Lastiwka assisted in the work. The 26' x 44' log structure was built on a stone foundation, with parishioners contributing their time as available. In 1906, Michael Zukiwski completed the exterior siding. That winter, he and Peter Gudsovaty, along with other members, finished the interior and built the altar.

On October 14, 1906, the Feast Day of St. Mary the Protectress, Reverend Antony Pechinsky consecrated the church. Russian Orthodox clergy assisted in the service, and the sanctuary was formally adopted under its patron's name.

Although construction was completed in 1906, clear title to the property was not obtained until 1910, following a government inspection. In 1908, Nikolai Lukian donated a set of four clarion bells, hauling them from Fort Saskatchewan by oxen-drawn sleigh. By 1911, the parish had 33 members, many of whom had emigrated from Boriwtzi, Bukovyna.



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In 1920, the congregation joined the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada (UGOC), making their sanctuary the oldest church structure in Alberta to belong to the UGOC. The construction of the CPR rail line through Willingdon in 1928 shifted the district's focal point. Despite this, many loyal parishioners continued to use St. Mary the Protectress as their family sanctuary. The Borowich cemetery also remained a significant burial site.

During the early to mid-1940s, a prairie fire destroyed the original bell tower and many wooden grave markers. The church itself was saved. In 1947, Harry M. Zukiwski and John Shemko built a new bell tower. In 1955, a larger dome was added to the sanctuary roof. That year, the congregation hosted four Divine Liturgies, serving 11 families. However, only four were registered as paid members. By 1960, the church had 21 member families, comprising 69 individuals. Many worshipers attended services at neighboring parishes.

The church's original registration as part of the Russo-Greek Catholic Orthodox parish of Shandro led to ownership disputes. In 1958–1959, the Catholic Church claimed the property. This prompted the congregation to incorporate under the Religious Societies Lands Act as the “Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of St. Pokrova.” The legal battle concluded in 1973, with ownership officially transferred to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

In 1980, the Zukiwski family donated a memorial commemorating the church's founders to mark Alberta's 75th anniversary. Reverends Soroka and Semotiuk blessed the memorial on August 2, 1980. The congregation celebrated its 90th anniversary in September 1997 with an Episcopal Divine Liturgy. Archbishop Ivan led the service, accompanied by Reverends Y. Puk, S. Semotiuk, M. Sawchenko, and Deacon C. Zubritsky. Local dignitaries, including the Honourable Ed Stelmach and Leon Benoit, MP for Vegreville, attended the event.



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Priests

- Antony (Phillip?) Pechinsky (1906–?)
- A. Pohrebniak (1916)
- Gregory Soroka (1919–1920)
- I. Kusey (1920–1924)
- I. Mayba (1928–1932)
- T. Kisiliuk (1929–1933)
- T. Horbay (1933–1938)
- D. Stratyчук (1932–1938)
- I. Hykawy (1938–1940)
- S. Symchych (1940–1944)
- M. Fyk (1944–1945)
- H. Wasyliw (1945–1950)
- Y. Triska (1950–1955)
- D. Luchak (1955–1957)
- S. Stoliarchuk (1957–1963)
- I. Hykawy (1963–1968)
- O. Olekshy (1969–1970)
- D. Luchak (1970–1971)
- P. Hnatiw (1971–1974)
- D. Luchak (1974–1977?)
- S. Soroka (1977–1980)
- Y. Puk (1988–1994)
- B. Ambrosie (2003–present)



Location and Feast Day

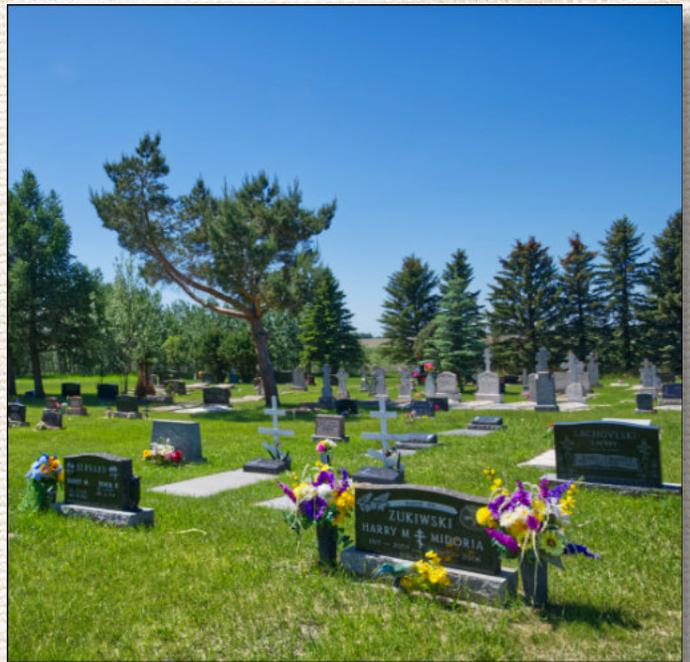
One mile north of Willingdon, on Range Road 153, at NE 14-56-15, County of Two Hills. *GPS Coordinates:* 53.845508, -112.110012 Their *Feast Day* is October 14.

Founding Members

- Hryhory Kowalchuk
- Michael Zukiwsky
- Michael Gordey
- Wasył Dushenski

Cemetery

Established in 1902 at the church site. The first burial was John Tarangul, who died from a horse kick while shoeing.



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