

# UKRAINIAN CHURCH ARCHITECTURE IN MANITOBA

Initially, harsh circumstances necessitated the construction of log churches by Ukrainian immigrants to Manitoba. As the communities grew and prospered, however, modest wood frame and eventually “cathedral-style” buildings were raised. But these new structures were not facsimiles of the churches they had left in Ukraine. Not only did they have to adapt forms and details to a new climate, but the dearth of master craftsmen and the lack of immediate access to tangible traditional precedents meant that only a partial transference of building skills could be achieved. Moreover, Ukrainian settlers were often influenced by nearby settlers and their particular building techniques. This combination often led to the mix of traditional Ukrainian forms with those methods being practiced in turn-of-the-century Manitoba.

## **Manitoba Log Churches**

During the waves of immigration during the 1880s and 1890s, almost all of the better farmland in southern Manitoba was patented. This left only marginal land unoccupied in the southeast, the Interlake and the Dauphin regions. Here the eastern Europeans settled in the 1890s. A small church or chapel was often amongst the first buildings to be erected by the devout, newly-arrived immigrants. Where they were not replaced by newer structures, a few of these churches remain, demonstrating that their builders had attempted to duplicate buildings which were most familiar to them.

Only four surviving log churches have so far been positively identified. Three of these – St. Michael’s Ukrainian Catholic Church, Trembowla, St. Michael’s Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Gardenton and St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Sirko – were built by Ukrainian pioneers. The fourth log church, St. Elie Romanian Orthodox Church, Lennard is Romanian, but its distinctive design is derived from the same Eastern European traditions.

The oldest Ukrainian church in Canada, St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church at Trembowla, has important historical, as well as architectural claims. The Ukrainian pioneers who built the church in the Mink River area arrived in the district in 1896. They persuaded Father Nestor Dmytriw, editor of the American newspaper Svoboda, to visit them while on a Canadian tour. In the spring of 1897, Father Dmytriw celebrated the first Ukrainian Catholic Liturgy in Canada in the Trembowla area, at what is now called the Cross of Freedom Site. In the fall, he blessed a cemetery at Mink River and encouraged the congregation to build a church there, which they did the following year. St. Michael's, though small in size, boasts an interior that is a remarkable example of Byzantine-style icon painting and decoration.

Foremost among log Ukrainian churches is St. Michael's Orthodox Church at Gardenton, consecrated in 1899 (Figure 20). At first this building had a straw-thatched low-pitched gable roof, with the middle section jutting out to form the traditional central frame of the Ukrainian church plan. Within two years, however, the thatch roof was replaced by shingles and the oak, ash, cedar and tamarack logs were covered with siding. The plan of St. Michael's has remained basically unaltered and is the type most popular in Ukraine: three frames orientated on an east-west axis, with the central frame slightly larger than the adjacent two.

In 1915, the old roof, which had rotted and leaked badly, was replaced by the present roof and dome structure, designed by Menholy Chalaturnyk, also the designer of the church at Sirko. This carpenter/builder rebuilt the roof according to examples remembered from his native Bukovyna and completed it by the fall of 1915. The drum is octagonal, pierced at its base by two small square windows on the north and south sides. Capping this is a single dome, edged by a strip of decorative trim and covered by tin. Chalaturnyk also placed two small cupolas the ridge of the hipped roofs, over the outer frames. These are also encased in tin and, unlike the large central dome which is crowned by an Orthodox cross, have traditional Latin crosses, suggesting that Catholics contributed to its construction.



**Figure 19.**

St. Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church, Trembowla, built in 1898, making it the oldest surviving Ukrainian church in Canada .



**Figure 20.**

St. Michael's Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church, Gardenton. The Plan of the church – three frames oriented on an east-west axis with the central frame slightly larger than the adjacent two – has remained basically unaltered.

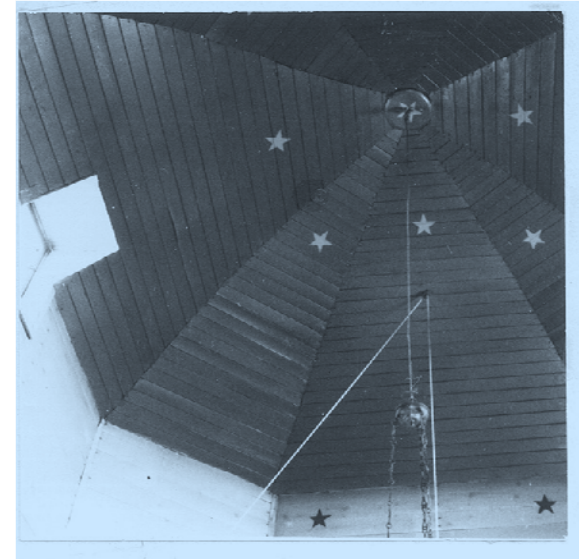


**Figure 21.**

St. Michael's Church, Gardenton. This view into the west frame shows the icons and the impermanent seating.

The original design of the roof was a provincial form typical in Bukovyna. Chalaturnyk's dome and cupolas, however, illustrated a rising awareness of a Ukrainian national identity among Bukovynian settlers. Ukrainian national consciousness had been strengthened in Canada by the close contact made by immigrants from various Ukrainian provinces and their exposure to a thriving Ukrainian language press. It is not surprising then, that the designer of the 1915 church roof selected a style which was more common to national religious architecture throughout the entire Ukraine.

The interior of St. Michael's, Gardenton, reflects the splendour and love of brilliant colour and decoration found in the Eastern Church. Entering through the front door, the worshipper is drawn into a series of spaces. From the entrance to the iconostas, movement was originally unobstructed by seating, with the exception of a few benches placed against the walls for the elderly. Devout parishioners were required to stand during the service. Moving forward from the small porch, it is necessary to step up into the west end frame – a shallow barrel-vaulted room lined by brightly painted planking (Figure 21). Small hand-fashioned shelves and a variety of icons enclose the east corner; a brass chandelier hangs from above. Passing beneath the devotional expression inscribed above the arched partition opening, "Our Hope is in God," written in Ukrainian, the worshipper enters the large domed central space (Figure 22). Overhead, gold stars on a background of midnight blue speckle the undersurface of the dome. Two magnificent chandeliers are suspended from the dome ceiling: one is double-tiered of brass and crystal, the other is of wood, iconographically carved with stylized wings.



**Figure 22.**

St. Michael's Church, Gardenton. Interior of the dome.

**Figure 23.**

St. Michael's Church, Gardenton. Altar area, showing devotional pictures and handmade altar fixtures.

The iconostas, designed by Wasyl Chornopysky, is covered from floor to dome with framed icons, many of which were imported from Kiev, St. Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa and donated by the parishioners (Figure 23). The screen is pierced by the traditional three openings, with the Royal Doors of the central portal decorated by fretwork. Chornopysky also carved the colourful candelabras, scripture stand and table as companion pieces to the large wooden cross, dated 1902. Pennants and banners donated by the early parishioner's stand against the partition walls of the central nave. Several fine objects lie upon the altar within the sanctuary. The large Holy Gospel, printed in Church Slavonic, is bound in red velvet with engraved metal Figures and clasps. The chief carpenter of the original church, Wasyl Kekot, had carved an intricate wooden cross, dated 1897, for the church's consecration. Two years before the reconsecration ceremony, held in the fall of 1915, he fashioned a new crucifix. Both crosses, displayed in the church, exhibit exceptional skill and beauty.

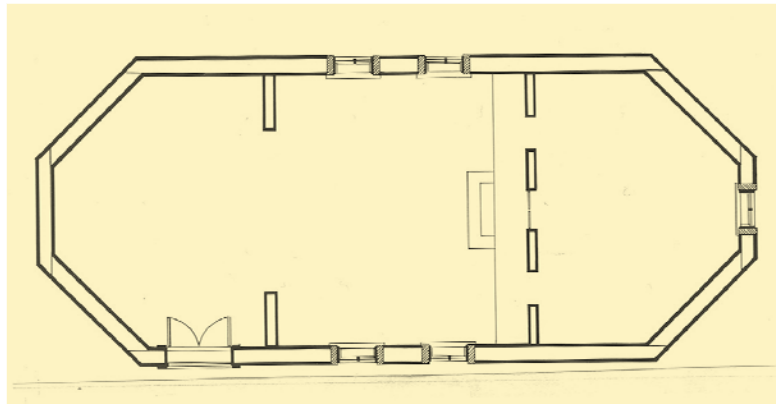
St. Elias Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church at Sirko (Figure 24) was erected in 1909, and is slightly larger than St. Elie at Lennard due to the extended sanctuary. Other than this, both the Sirko and the Lennard churches are very similar in plan and form. Both are built on a rectangular plan extended on the short sides with curved vestibules and altars (Figure 25). The roof shapes of both are reminiscent of the broad thatched roofs of Ukrainian houses, but are distinguished from other early Ukrainian churches by the eave, which sweeps uninterrupted around the building. The Sirko structure initially suited the small congregation, but was replaced by a newer house of worship in 1950. The old church, nevertheless remains. It is used as the cemetery chapel and for individual worship.





**Figure 24.**

St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Sirko.



**Figure 25.**

Floor plan. St. Elias Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Sirko.



**Figure 26.**

Bell tower of St. Alias church, Sirko. The roof of the tower is built of roughly laid vertical shakes similar in nature to planking. Bell towers were a ubiquitous feature on Ukrainian churchyard in Manitoba, just as they had been in Ukraine. Those in Manitoba were, like this one, simply constructed and animated with a few functional, but decorative elements.

The corners of the old church are probably of dovetail construction. The whole of the exterior was mud-plastered and whitewashed. Later this covering was hidden by wooden horizontal siding. The corners of the free-standing bell tower, however, have their dovetail joints exposed (Figure 26). The beams and joists used to construct the upper tower are joined with fairly elaborate connections which have been pegged. The same construction techniques were likely used in the church.

Although St. Elie Romanian Orthodox Church is not strictly of Ukrainian original, there are several reasons for its inclusion in this study. The building is the oldest Romanian Orthodox Church in Manitoba, and Ukrainians in the area did attend services there and may have contributed to its construction. Moreover, the church building itself closely resembles Ukrainian log church designs. Indeed, as noted above, its form, which is derived from Bukovynian domestic architecture, is closely allied with St. Elias at Sirko. St. Elie was built in 1908, replacing a smaller log edifice from 1904 (Figure 27). Between 1903 and 1904, until the first church was built, services were held out-of-doors.

Upon entering St. Elie one passes into a small vestibule. Above is the balcony for the cantor (ritual singer). A few short steps beyond is the nave. The view towards the iconostas is, as usual, unobstructed by any seating (Figure 28). Many of the icons which hang upon the iconostas were brought by the settlers to the new land (Figure 29) as were the banners and a number of holy articles. The altar itself is decorated with an elaborate altar cloth. A number of the church possessions, such as the candle holders and lanterns, were handcrafted. The walls of the interior are covered with pressed sheet metal of a type originally made at the turn of the century (Figure 30). Originally silver in colour, the walls have subsequently been painted blue. The ceiling is also a pale blue, implying the heavenly vault.





**Figure 27.**

St. Elie Church, Lennard, shortly after its construction. (St. Elie Romanian Orthodox Church Museum) A restoration project begun in 1979 has seen the church, which now functions as a museum, carefully restored.



**Figure 28.**

St. Elie Church, Lennard. This view shows the iconostas and icons.



**Figure 29.**

St. Elie Church, Lennard. Looking down from the cantor's loft the altar area, the Royal Doors can be seen in their closed position.



**Figure 30.**

St. Elie Church, Lennard. Detail of sheet metal wall panels.