INTRODUCTION: Ukrainian Immigrants in the City 1890s-1920s

One hundred and twenty years after the first Ukrainian immigrants arrived in Canada, they continue to conjure up images of impoverished peasants wrapped in sheepskin coats arduously tilling the soil along the northern fringe of Prairie settlement. Few people realize that Ukrainian immigrants were also taking up residence and establishing urban enclaves in Canadian cities prior to the turn of the twentieth century. Winnipeg, a major railway and immigration dispersal point through which Ukrainian immigrants passed en route to farm lands in western Canada, quickly became home to the largest urban concentration of Ukrainians in Canada. When Dr Joseph Oleskow (Oleskiv), the agronomist who first promoted and popularized Ukrainian settlement on the Canadian Prairies, visited Winnipeg in 1895, he met several Ukrainian families who had been living in the city since 1892-3. The men worked as wood cutters and as labourers on construction projects and in the CPR yards, while their wives earned a dollar a day as laundresses. A few owned their own homes and had money in the bank. Two years later, Father Nestor Dmytriw, the first Ukrainian Catholic priest to visit Winnipeg, observed that there were about 200 Ukrainians in the city. Some were saving money to purchase farm equipment and take up homesteading; others had decided to remain in the city. In general, immigrants who arrived late in the year or lacked the capital to begin homesteading immediately stayed in the city, and those who managed to find jobs often took up permanent residence. Ukrainian blacksmiths, carpenters, cobbler and tailors, though few in number, also chose to remain in Winnipeg where their employment prospects were better than in rural areas. When they found a permanent job, they sent for their wives and children. By the turn of the century, Winnipeg with its railway yards, construction projects, stockyards and meat-packing plants, iron contract shops, and hundreds of miles of sewers to be installed and streets to be paved, was also attracting single Ukrainian men, who came on their own as sojourners rather than as settlers.

The number of Ukrainians in urban centres, especially Winnipeg, increased dramatically after 1905. Canada's prewar boom in railway construction, mining, lumbering and the pulp and paper industries attracted thousands of young, often unmarried male and female workers to the country's frontier regions and urban centres. Perhaps as many as one half of the Ukrainians who reached Canadian shores between 1906 and 1914 did not settle on the land. While artisans, craftsmen and skilled labourers, who found steady employment, took up permanent residence in the larger cities, unskilled migrant frontier labourers, who constituted a majority of the newcomers, converged in cities like Winnipeg only during the winter months when jobs were scarce. Official census data, which did not reflect Ukrainian population figures accurately prior to 1931, indicate that Winnipeg's permanent Ukrainian population grew from 3,600 in 1911, to 7,000 in 1921, to 21,450 in 1931. But even before the First World War, when seasonally unemployed migrant labourers descended
upon the city between late November and early May, the number of Ukrainians in Winnipeg could swell to 15,000.

In 1913, the Reverend James S Woodsworth of the All People's Mission calculated that a man with a wife and three children needed an annual income of $1,200, or 45 cents an hour, nine hours a day, 300 days a year, "to maintain an ordinary 'decent' Canadian standard of living" in Winnipeg. Only a small minority of Ukrainian skilled craftsmen, who earned 50 to 70 cents an hour, enjoyed such a standard of living. Very few urban Ukrainian family men earned as much as $1,200 annually. Labourers in railway yards and packing houses, teamsters, sewer excavators, builders' labourers, and even painters in CPR car repair shops, earned 18 to 36 cents an hour, usually worked eight months in the year and took home about $350 to $720 annually.

How then, did the early Ukrainian immigrants manage to survive in Winnipeg? Most of the city's resident Ukrainians were members of families that functioned as economic units and were uniquely equipped to survive in conditions of chronic unemployment and low wages. In such households, all family members who worked at home or joined the labour force on a part- or full-time basis, augmented the male household's income. Women and children supplemented family incomes and helped carry them through periods of unemployment by means of non-moneyed economic activity such as tending vegetable gardens, processing food, raising chickens and rabbits, making and repairing clothes or looking after younger siblings. Taking in boarders had the same effect and was a strategy well suited to urban families who could purchase or rent a house and provide single immigrants with basic services such as bed, board and laundry in exchange for cash. Women could also augment family income by doing laundry or cleaning the homes of wealthier residents, while school children contributed earnings from newspaper routes and part-time delivery jobs. Older, unmarried children, who were no longer in school but lived at home and worked full-time, also contributed most of their earnings to the family.

Data culled from Henderson's Winnipeg city directories suggest that in 1911 over 44 per cent of Ukrainian males (whose employers could be identified) worked for the City of Winnipeg, primarily on crews engaged in street, sidewalk, sewer and street railway construction and repair; 31 percent worked for the Canadian Pacific, Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific Railways; and 6.5 percent for such city contract iron shops as Manitoba Bridge and Iron, Dominion Bridge, and Vulcan Iron Works. Of the Ukrainian males whose occupations were listed, about 84 per cent were

Dufferin Avenue market (PAM)

Street railway construction (UCEC)
unskilled labourers or employees and only 10 per cent could be classified as skilled or semiskilled workers, craftsmen or tradesmen. In 1921, the railways still employed 30 per cent of Ukrainian males, but only 6 per cent worked for the City since street and sewer construction had been completed and the boom years had ended. About 10 per cent now worked for the iron shops; another 10 per cent for the meat-packing houses (primarily Swift's and Gordon, Ironside & Fares, which had expanded greatly during the war years); 6 per cent for the Winnipeg Street Railway Company; and 3.5 per cent for various hotels, cafes, and restaurants. Some 71 per cent were in unskilled work, while almost 17 per cent could be classified as skilled or semiskilled craftsmen and tradesmen.

The data on Ukrainian women employed full-time outside the home in Winnipeg are incomplete and much less reliable but they do suggest several trends. Of the few women listed in 1911, almost 30 per cent were employed in hotels as maids; the remainder were fairly evenly dispersed among restaurants, cafes, paper box factories, garment factories, meat-packing houses and department stores. In 1921 hotels, restaurants/cafes, paper box factories, garment factories, meat-packing houses and various confectionary manufacturers each employed about 7 per cent of Ukrainian women (or 42 per cent of the total). Department stores (Woolworth's, Eaton's, Hudson's Bay), hospitals and private homes each employed 5 per cent (or 15 per cent of the total). The occupation of most Ukrainian women who worked outside the home was listed simply as "labourer" or "employee"; about 15 per cent were maids, waitresses, domestics, cooks or laundresses; another 15 per cent were clerks, stenographers or bookkeepers.

Like all urban immigrants, Ukrainians in Winnipeg settled close to their place of work. By 1914, six Ukrainian residential enclaves had emerged. The oldest, north Point Douglas, was located east of Main Street, adjacent to the CPR station, several sawmills, and major food processing and iron works shops. The largest and most important enclave was in the North End, the immigrant district west of Main Street that extended north from the CPR yards to Mountain Avenue (and further west as far as Inkster Boulevard). Here most of the city's Jews, Germans, Poles and Ukrainians resided in cheap housing within walking distance of the CPR yards and numerous medium-sized industrial enterprises. Here too, the major institutions established by immigrants of all ethnic
origins were located. A third enclave emerged in the Brooklands near the CPR shops at the city's north western periphery. A fourth appeared in Elmwood and East Kildonan, on the east side of the Red River opposite the North End. The fifth was in Transcona at the city's north eastern periphery, where Ukrainians who worked in the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) shops began to settle around 1910. The sixth and smallest enclave, in Fort Rouge near the CNoR yards, was the only one located south of the city centre.

In all of these enclaves, but especially in the North End, a broad range of Ukrainian secular and religious organizations were functioning by the time the Great War broke out in 1914 and brought to an end the first phase of Ukrainian immigration to Winnipeg. Immigrant organizations, which helped the newcomers to adapt to life in Canada, were most vibrant in urban centres like Winnipeg, which attracted a larger proportion of the younger, better-educated, more skilled and more ambitious immigrants. By 1914 Winnipeg was home to more Ukrainian priests, teachers, political activists and writers than any other urban or rural centre in Canada, and it was populated by growing numbers of small businessmen, artisans, literate labourers and students, who were eager 'to improve' themselves by attending lectures, or by enrolling in technical and commercial courses, teachers' colleges (normal schools) or university. Unlike their older countrymen with large families to support, young, skilled and literate immigrants could devote more of their free time to cultural and political activities in community organizations that also offered opportunities for socializing. The polyethnic character of Winnipeg also encouraged the proliferation of Ukrainian organizations and activities. Interaction with local Jews, Poles, Germans, Icelanders and Canadians of British and French origin prompted Ukrainians to compare their community with those of their neighbours, to emulate their achievements, and to seek their recognition. The religious and secular societies they established, the churches and community halls they built, and the cultural and educational activities they pursued to satisfy spiritual, aesthetic and nostalgic needs, were, in the end, also attempts to demonstrate that Ukrainians were the equals of other immigrant groups. Finally, the competing claims of the immigrants' traditional Catholic and Orthodox clerical leaders, and young radicals who wanted to minimize clerical influence and establish the Ukrainian-Canadian community on secular principles, also had a major impact on Ukrainian community-building and organizational life in Winnipeg.

By the mid-1920s, when the second wave of Ukrainian immigration to Canada got underway, Winnipeg's Ukrainians had established a broad array of community organizations that included church parishes and congregations (representing at least five denominations); fraternal and benevolent societies; reading clubs and libraries; weekly newspapers; a day school and several Ukrainian heritage evening schools; a plethora of choral and dramatic societies; several community halls that housed numerous cultural-educational groups; a student club and several student residences; a radical leftist workers' organization whose national headquarters were located in a very impressive labour temple; and a small but expanding and increasingly diversified group of Ukrainian-owned business enterprises.
The pages that follow focus on these organizations and institutions. Most are presented chronologically, in the form of brief, descriptive articles that trace the origins and early activity of parishes, congregations and secular organizations established by the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants in Winnipeg. Several pages, which deal with previously unexplored social and cultural phenomena, including the first Ukrainian entrepreneurs and university students, and the Ukrainian immigrant theatre, are presented in the form of longer thematic and analytical essays. Taken together, they offer both a bird's eye view of the city's Ukrainian-Canadian community during its formative years, and a street-level tour of immigrant institutions and an urban landscape that have almost completely disappeared.

-- Orest T. Martynowych

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