

The Ukrainian Baptist congregation

A small group of Ukrainian Baptists (Stundists), who emigrated from eastern Ukraine in the Russian Empire at the turn of the twentieth century, was barely noticed by contemporaries and has been overlooked by most chroniclers and historians. In 1903, about 15 families reached Winnipeg and held their first worship services in private homes on Barber and Grove Streets in Point Douglas. A congregation was organized later that year and by 1904-05 services were being held in a building in the North End on Burrows Avenue. Ivan Shakotko, a 25 year-old native of Chernihiv gubernia, east of Kyiv, was elected pastor, while Wasyl Bubyc and Mykhailo Nykyforiv were chosen deacons. Charlie Hilton, a deacon of the First Baptist Church at the corner of Cumberland Avenue and Hargrave Street, who had learned Russian while working as an engineer in the Tsarist Empire, assisted the new immigrants by acting as an intermediary between the Ukrainians and the city's English-speaking Baptist establishment. He helped the newcomers obtain material assistance, taught Sunday School classes, and recommended Shakotko and Mykyta Kravetsky for ordination as Baptist pastors in 1905. Kravetsky was a farmer from eastern Galicia who had been converted from Ukrainian Catholicism to Baptism by Johan Burgdorf, a German Baptist missionary from Ukraine who was active in southern Manitoba.

Although Winnipeg's small Ukrainian Baptist congregation grew from 15 to 24 members between 1905 and 1910, most Ukrainian Baptists who immigrated to Canada from the Russian Empire, including many who had briefly resided in the city, were drawn to the land and eventually took out homesteads in Saskatchewan and Alberta, thereby guaranteeing that the Winnipeg congregation would remain a marginal institution. In 1906 Shakotko was appointed "missionary to the Russo-Ukrainian people of the West" and transferred to Canora, Saskatchewan. His successor, Ivan Artemenko, who had been recruited in eastern Ukraine, was also transferred to missionary work in rural Western Canada after two or three years in Winnipeg, as were local activists Wasyl Bubyc, Mykhailo Nykyforiv and Khoma Tvardovsky. By 1910, Mykyta Kravetsky was in charge of Ukrainian Baptist congregations in Winnipeg and in Overstone, near Stuartburn. Using the Tabernacle Baptist Church at 297 Burrows Avenue and Charles Street, and the Ukrainian Baptist mission at the corner of Manitoba Avenue and McKenzie Street as his base, Kravetsky managed to convert a handful of local Ukrainians and in the fall of 1912 he established a Ukrainian Baptist evening school in the mission home. Neither endeavour had a lasting impact. Kravetsky's most high-profile convert, the relatively well-



Peter Kindrat (UCEC)

educated Independent Greek Church missionary Maksym Berezynsky, soon returned to that Church and ultimately became a Presbyterian and United Church minister. The school, taught by Kravetsky and Johan Wagner, a German Baptist from Ukraine, offered classes in Ukrainian reading and writing for public school children, and English-language classes for adults, but it expired after one or two years.

During the 1920s Peter Kindrat, another native of eastern Galicia, who had received his pastoral training at Brandon College and McMaster University, served as pastor of the Ukrainian Baptist congregation in Winnipeg (as well as congregations in Overstone and Dauphin, Manitoba). As a very small religious and regional minority, concerned above all with the Bible and personal salvation, rather than with old country politics and ethno-cultural survival in the new world, Winnipeg's Ukrainian Baptists continued to exist at the margins of the local Ukrainian-Canadian community. Even Kindrat's successor, Ivan Kmeta-Ichniansky, a gifted poet and linguist, who emigrated from Soviet Ukraine

in the late 1920s and oversaw the construction of the congregation's first permanent church building (both of which survive to this day) at 300 Parr Street and Redwood Avenue, could do little to bridge the chasm between his flock and the larger community.

-- Orest T. Martynowych

Websites

Ukrainian Evangelical Baptist Church

See the excerpts from Peter Kindrat, *Ukrainian Baptist Movement in Canada*

<http://uebcc.org/Site%202/Kindrat.html>