

The Zaporizka Sich Association

After the demise of the Taras Shevchenko Educational Society in 1909, the moderate elements, who believed that Winnipeg's Ukrainian immigrants should be organized along ethnic or national lines, rather than on the basis of denominational affiliation or class allegiance, established the Zaporizka Sich Association (*Tovarystvo Zaporizka Sich*). The Association was named after the Cossack fortress on the Dnieper River that had been a beacon of liberty for Ukrainian runaway serfs and impoverished petty gentry during the 16th-18th centuries. Composed primarily of young bilingual school teachers, small businessmen, and high school and university students, the Zaporizka Sich Association identified itself as a youth organization and was modelled, to some extent, on the old country, Radical Party-sponsored Sich, an organization that combined gymnastics, cultural-educational activity and volunteer work, and was itself patterned on the Czech Sokol movement.



TD Ferley (UCEC)

Established in July 1910, the Zaporizka Sich grew to about 120 members by the fall of that year. Its leaders included Semen Kowbel, Taras Ferley, and Ivan Sliuzar who, like Ferley, had been active in the Radical Party. Members first met in the hall adjacent to Ss Vladimir and Olga Ukrainian Catholic church and later at Jastremsky's hall across the street. They established a small library, imported books from Lviv, sponsored weekly or biweekly lectures and debates during the fall and winter, staged several plays and concerts, offered special literacy classes, and participated in physical exercise and gymnastics at least once a week. Lecturers spoke about the confusion of ritual and superstition with religion, about the merits and dangers of nationalism and internationalism, about Marxist utopianism, and about women's rights. Many non-members, including women, attended these lectures. Following one lecture on female emancipation, delivered by a man, only men participated in the discussion because the women present were too shy to speak up. Most of the male speakers criticized women's fashions

and expressed scepticism about the women's movement. The general consensus was that Ukrainian women had to read more and obtain a better education; there could be no equality for women until they were as well-educated as men. Debates also addressed the issue of women's rights, the impact of Protestant missionaries on Ukrainian immigrants, and the pros and cons of assimilation. A debate on the question, "Will our people assimilate?" resulted in a victory for the affirmative side which cited countless examples of English words used by most Ukrainians in everyday conversations, and the fact that many educated Ukrainian parents only taught their children to speak English. In the spring and summer of 1911, the Association organized several political mass meetings in response to the current Austrian parliamentary elections: at the first meeting, \$102 were raised for the Ukrainian Peasants' electoral fund; the second meeting protested the corruption and violence that took the lives of several Ukrainian villagers during the campaign and raised over \$50 for those widowed and orphaned in the disorders.



S Kowbel (UCEC)

During its brief two year life, the Zaporizka Sich Association also initiated two projects that would play an important role in the life of the city's Ukrainian-Canadian community. First, the

association established a committee to raise funds for a Ukrainian student residence (*bursa*) that would facilitate the pursuit of high school and university education by young Ukrainian Canadians, especially those who could not count on the support of parents and those who lived in remote rural settlements. Second, the association also began to call for the establishment of a Ukrainian 'people's home' or 'national home' (*narodnyi dim*), a facility with an auditorium, a stage, and office and storage space, where all of the city's Ukrainian cultural-educational societies could store their books and property, hold meetings and lectures, rehearse, and stage concerts and plays. Other ethnic groups, it was pointed out, already had such facilities. The escalating costs of rented premises also made it necessary to erect such a hall. Ultimately, the absence of a suitable and affordable meeting place brought the Zaporizka Sich Association to an end in the fall of 1912.

-- Orest T. Martynowych

Books

Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1991).