

Improbable Scholars?

Ukrainian-Canadian Students at the University of Manitoba, 1909-1929

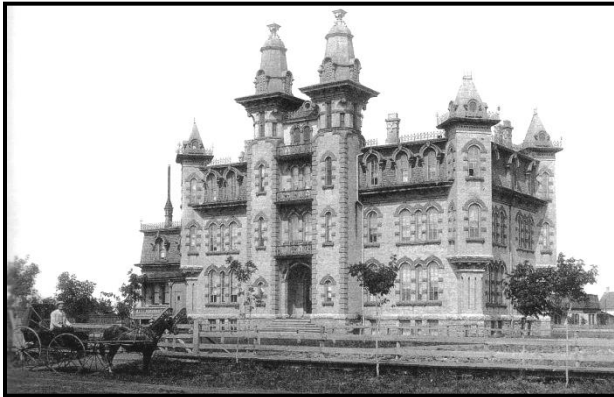
Orest T. Martynowych

A paper on Ukrainian Canadians who studied at the University of Manitoba and graduated from North American universities *before 1929* may strike many readers as something of an anomaly. After all, academic life and achievements are not usually associated with the first wave of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada. Historians and community leaders who celebrate Ukrainian pioneers prefer to focus on the physical strength, endurance, and hardships experienced by the men and women “in sheepskin coats” and on their ability to transform heavily forested lands along the northern fringe of Prairie settlement into productive farms. Nor do census data offer much encouragement in this regard. According to the 1921 census, 30.39 percent of Ukrainian Canadians ten years of age and older could not read or write any language. Only the aboriginal population had a higher rate of illiteracy and only the Chinese were as illiterate as Ukrainian Canadians although, among the population twenty-one years of age and older, almost 42 percent of all Ukrainians but only 32 percent of the Chinese, were unable to read or write. Such figures set Ukrainians apart from most Canadians, among whom only 3.7 percent of the population ten years of age and older was illiterate. Well into the 1930s Ukrainians remained the most illiterate segment of the Canadian population; their knowledge of English (or French) lagged behind that of most European newcomers; they left school at a younger age than most Canadians; and despite undeniable progress in education and social status, Ukrainian Canadians were still significantly underrepresented among Canada’s high school and university students, professionals, entrepreneurs and creative intelligentsia. Indeed, it would take more than four decades, well into the 1970s, before Ukrainian Canadians began to equal and surpass national standards in education.

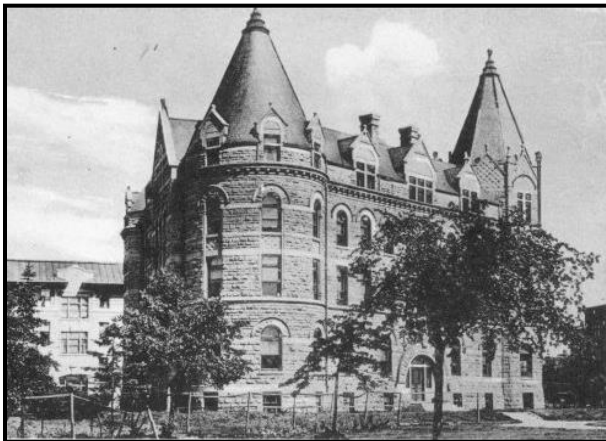
Nevertheless, Ukrainian Canadians began to enrol in degree programs at the University of Manitoba in 1909; Ukrainian student organizations began to appear in Winnipeg as early as 1912; the first Ukrainian student residences were organized in 1915-16; and by 1929, at least sixty Ukrainian Canadians (including seven women) who lived and studied in Winnipeg had earned seventy-two university degrees from the University of Manitoba and six other Canadian and American universities. In addition to identifying the first graduates and their fields of study, and briefly examining the organizations and activities in which they participated during their student years, this paper also delves into the social background of the graduates and attempts to delineate changing trends in the composition of Winnipeg’s first Ukrainian-Canadian university students and graduates.

The University of Manitoba before the Great War

During the 1911-12 academic year there were about 13,000 students registered at Canadian universities. Of these, 704 attended the University of Manitoba, the oldest and at the time the largest Canadian university west of southern Ontario. Established in 1877, the University's colleges, schools and faculties were dispersed all over Winnipeg. Manitoba College, a Presbyterian institution, at the corner of Vaughan Street and Ellice Avenue, and Wesley College, a Methodist institution, at the corner of Portage Avenue and Balmoral Street, were located downtown, at the western edge of the city's commercial district. The



Manitoba College



Wesley College

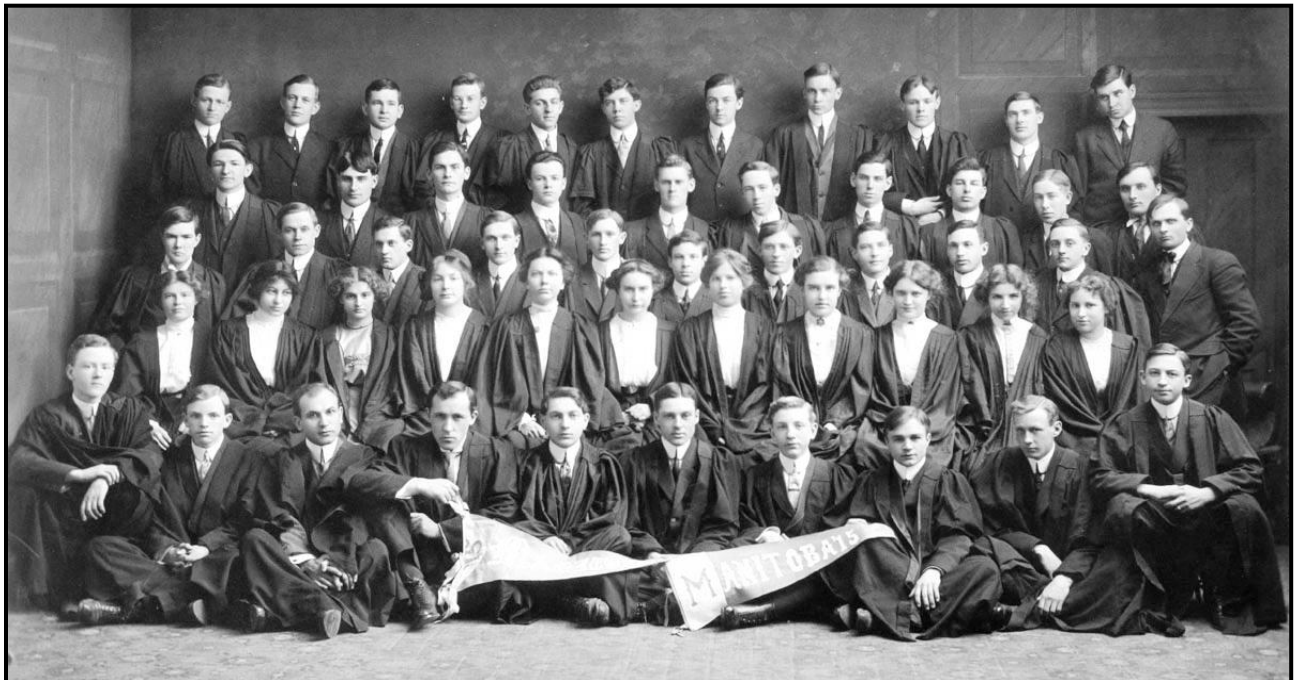
The new department of Engineering could be found a few blocks further West, near the corner of Portage Avenue and Sherbrook Street. All three were within easy walking distance of the Arts and Science complex housed in buildings cast off by the provincial government and located on Broadway Avenue near the Legislative Building. The Medical College was located about 1.5 km north of Wesley College at the corner of Bannatyne Avenue and Emily Street. The University's two other colleges were even more remote. St John's College, an Anglican institution at the corner of Main Street and Church Avenue in the old St John's district just north of the immigrant North End, was over 4 km from Wesley College, while St Boniface College, which stood adjacent to the Roman Catholic cathedral in the predominantly French-speaking town of that name, was some 2 km distant on the eastern side of the Red River. Furthest removed, and still under construction in 1911-12, were the Manitoba College of Agriculture, the School of Home Economics, and the Taché Hall student residence, all located on the University's new Fort Garry campus about 9 km south of the city centre.

The First Ukrainian University Students

Since 1904 a few dozen Ukrainian immigrants had been attending special Presbyterian-sponsored classes at Manitoba College designed to prepare young men for careers as public school teachers and Independent Greek Church missionaries in rural

Ukrainian colonies. While few became missionaries, by 1908-09 at least 14 young Ukrainians were enrolled in the college's two-year university entrance matriculation course. Not until September 1909 did a Ukrainian enrol in a regular University of Manitoba degree program. Orest Zerebko, the first Ukrainian-Canadian university student, was a twenty-two year-old immigrant who had graduated from the Ruthenian Training School, taught in several rural districts, and completed the matriculation course at St John's College. Others followed, pursuing their studies at the Broadway campus, at Wesley College (after Manitoba College stopped offering liberal arts courses in 1914), and at St Boniface College. By 1913-14, when University of Manitoba enrolment approached 975 students, seven Ukrainian men were enrolled in the Arts program. Three years later, with university enrolment down to 662 as a result of the Great War, which left relatively few able-bodied men on campus, 17 Ukrainian men, virtually all

Austrian-born and consequently perceived as undesirable by Canadian military recruiters, were studying at the University - 2 in Engineering, 2 in Medicine, 4 in Arts, 4 in Agriculture and 5 in Law. Although women constituted at least 15% of students at the University of Manitoba by 1914, there were still no Ukrainian women on campus. This prompted at least one Ukrainian newspaper editor to argue that Ukrainian girls should be encouraged to pursue university studies rather than being consigned to Normal Schools and Commercial Colleges, or channelled into factories and kitchens. When a Ukrainian woman finally enrolled in a degree program at the University in the fall of 1920 she turned out to be a newcomer from war-ravaged eastern Galicia. Mary Sawczak, the teenaged daughter of Ukrainian burghers, whose education had been interrupted by the First World War and the subsequent Polish-Ukrainian conflict, had managed to pass gymnasium matriculation exams only to be refused admission to Lviv University. Undaunted, she immigrated to Winnipeg, where she had an aunt, mastered English in six months, enrolled at the University of Manitoba, and completed the four year Bachelor of Arts degree in three years, working fulltime the last two years. (A year after graduating she married Dr Bronislaw Dyma, the first Ukrainian to graduate from the Manitoba Medical College.) A small but steady stream of Ukrainian-Canadian women, followed in her footsteps.



Manitoba College 1915 class: 1st row seated, 3rd and 4th from left, Gregory Novak and Demetrius Yakimischak; 4th row, 1st from left, Michael Luchkowich; 3rd row, 1st from right, Peter Woycenko; 4th row, 1st from right, Ivan Genik (UCEC)

During the war years, a small number of Canadian-born and -educated children of Ukrainian immigrants were also graduating from rural and urban high schools and enrolling at the University. By the fall of 1916, when there were 2,200 high school students in Winnipeg, about 30 to 50 Ukrainian Canadians were attending high school classes in the city, primarily at St John's High School at the corner of Church Avenue and Salter Street. Two years later about 50-60 passed exams in Grades IX, X and XI. In June 1923, about 250 young Ukrainian Canadians in Manitoba, including over 80 in Winnipeg, passed Grade VIII high school entrance exams, more than 60 passed high school exams (Grades IX-XII), and 19 graduated from St John's High School.



St John's High School

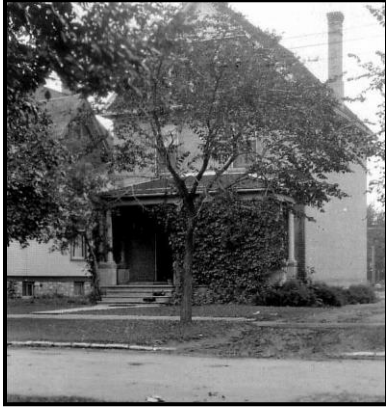
Still, as concerned Ukrainian community leaders pointed out, few Ukrainian parents understood the value of a higher education and in 1923 Ukrainians comprised a tiny fraction of Winnipeg's 4,500 high school students, being greatly outnumbered by the children of Jewish, German and British immigrants even in North End high schools like St John's and Isaac Newton.

In 1921-22, Ukrainian-Canadians constituted 21 of the 1,500 students pursuing degrees or diplomas at the University of Manitoba - 1 in Pharmacy, 3 in Agriculture, 3 in Law, 5 in

Medicine, and 9 in Arts and Science. By this time, some Ukrainian university students were winning awards, medals and scholarships (Koziar, Prodan, Pidruchny, Elcheshen, Symchych), thereby demonstrating their talent and industry, and helping to break down psychological barriers that had previously inhibited others from enrolling. Young Canadian-educated students like Jacob Stanko and William Wolokhatiuk-Wall, both sons of prosperous farmers in the Dauphin district, also raised collective confidence by matriculating from high school at the age of fourteen and graduating from the University of Manitoba at eighteen. In May 1928, a Ukrainian-Canadian weekly estimated that some 52 Ukrainians, including four award winners, among them the University Gold Medalist in Agriculture (Elcheshen), had written exams at the University of Manitoba. A year later, according to sociologist CH Young, Ukrainian Canadians represented 67 of the 2,700 students at the University of Manitoba; 44 were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts & Science, 8 in Agriculture, 6 in Engineering, 4 in Medicine, 2 in Law, 2 in Home Economics and 1 in Architecture. Finally, in June 1930, the *Manitoba Free Press* reported that 2.7% (or about 81) of the University's 3,000 students were of Ukrainian heritage. While these figures suggested a very impressive four-fold increase in the number of Ukrainian university students during the preceding eight years, Ukrainians who made up 10.5 % of the provincial population were still greatly underrepresented among university students and, more significantly, they lagged well behind numerically smaller ethnic groups like the Icelanders and the Jews who constituted 3% and 14.6% respectively of University of Manitoba students.

Ukrainian Student Residences

To encourage and facilitate the pursuit of higher education, some community leaders, in particular the teachers and cultural activists around the weekly *Ukrainskyi holos* (Ukrainian Voice), had argued for years that a Ukrainian student residence (*bursa*) had to be established in Winnipeg. Such a facility would provide inexpensive room and board for local students who could not rely on the financial support of their families, and for the sons of rural settlers. Meetings were first held and a fund-raising campaign launched in the fall of 1910, but not until the spring and summer of 1915 was any effort made to establish such an institution. It soon became apparent, however, that there was little consensus, even among those who supported the project, concerning the principles on which the residence was to be established. While the initial promoters maintained that the residence should be non-denominational and open to Ukrainian students of all religious persuasions, devout Ukrainian Catholics insisted that the residence should only admit Ukrainian Catholics. After a few raucous meetings in July 1915 it became clear that two student residences would have to be established.



Adam Kotsko Student Residence (UCEC)

The proponents of a secular, non-denominational student residence were first off the mark. In September 1915, they opened the Adam Kotsko Student Residence, named in memory of a Ukrainian student who had been killed several years earlier during the struggle for a Ukrainian university in Lviv. Located in a large house at 117 Juno Street near the corner of Bannatyne Avenue, within walking distance of the Medical College, Wesley College, the Broadway campus, and Winnipeg's Central High School, the residence housed 16 high school and university students during its first year. While the university students, including Michael Luchkowich, Manoly Mihaychuk, Theodore Humeniuk, Stephan Sawula, and HG Skehar worked as rural school teachers to finance their studies, most of the high school students were sons of farmers and their \$8-\$15 monthly fees were payable in cash or in agricultural produce. Dr John Pazdrey, the first Ukrainian physician in Canada and a graduate of Chicago's Northwestern University, provided the residents with free medical care

and delivered several lectures on health and hygiene. In addition to providing room and board, the residence was dedicated to the task of raising Ukrainian national awareness among its young charges and instilling in them the spirit of service to the Ukrainian-Canadian community. The university students, who were in charge of the day-to-day administration, taught the high school students Ukrainian language, literature and history and occasionally delivered lectures on a variety of topics. In 1916-17, during its second and last year, the Adam Kotsko residence moved to the North End where it was located in the recently purchased Ukrainian National Home at 582 Burrows Avenue and McGregor Street. It housed 27 students, aged 18 to 27, of whom 1 was Presbyterian, 2 were Orthodox and 24 were Ukrainian Catholic; all but one of the students were from Manitoba, 8 had taught in rural schools during the summer months, and 20 were working their way through school without any financial assistance from their parents.

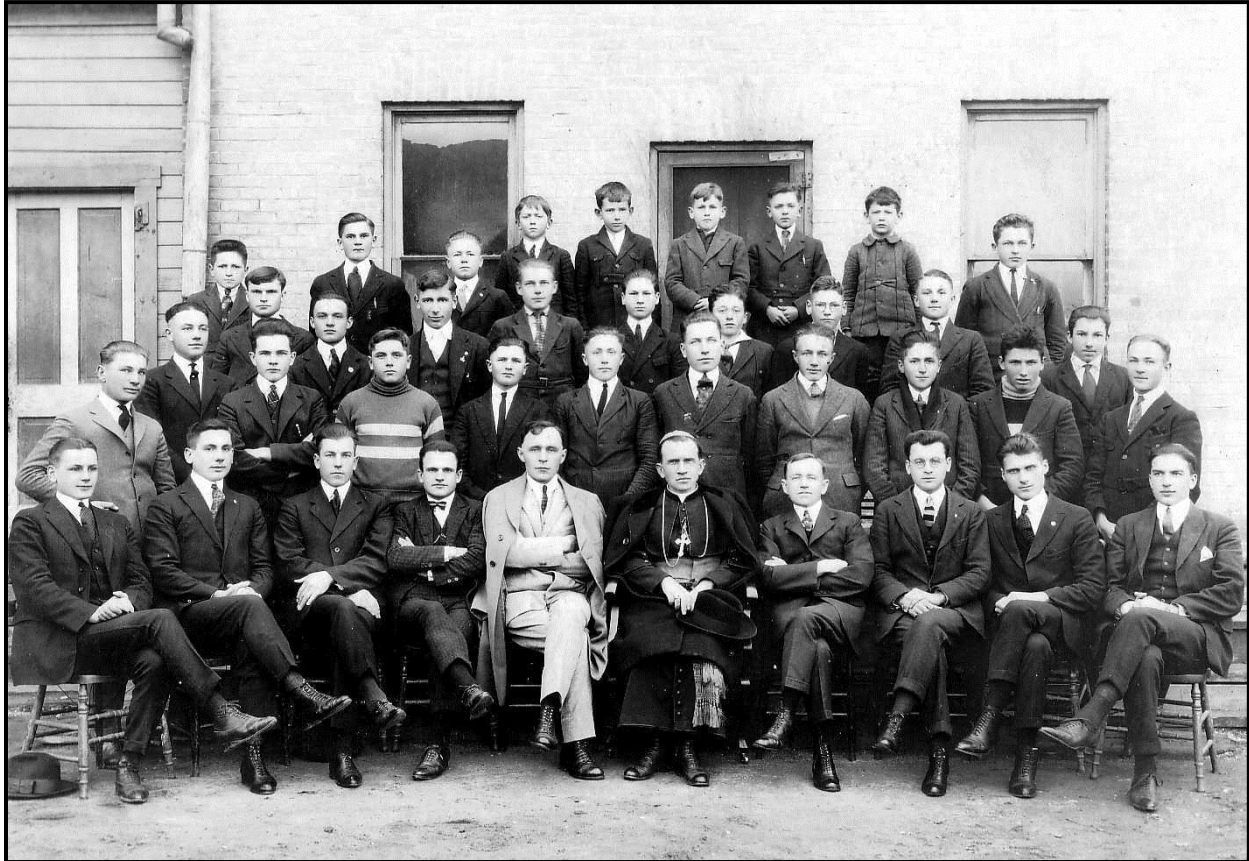


Sheptytsky Student Residence (UCEC)

When the Adam Kotsko Student Residence closed its doors in the summer of 1917, after two years of relentless criticism by Ukrainian Catholic clerical and lay leaders, the Ukrainian Catholics purchased a large three-storey building that had once served as a hotel in St Boniface and opened the Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky Ukrainian Catholic Student Residence. Open to male Ukrainian Catholic students of all ages, the residence had a chapel, gym, study hall, dining room, kitchen, administrative offices, a rector's residence and 40 rooms that could accommodate 80 students. According to a recently arrived Ukrainian Catholic pastor, it compared favourably with the finest Ukrainian student residences in eastern Galicia. During its first year, 1917-18, it housed 53 students - 17 in elementary school (Grade VIII and lower), 10 in high school, 23 in university entrance matriculation

courses, and only 3 in university. Thirty-four of the students were from Manitoba and 19 were from out of province, the majority from Saskatchewan. Residents adhered to a rigorous schedule of daily activities, rising at 6 am, attending Mass at 6:30, study hall from 7 to 7:45, and breakfast from 7:45 to 8:30, when they left to attend classes at nearby French Roman Catholic schools. Lunch, preceded by a religious reading, commenced at 12:15 pm and lasted one hour. Back from school in the late afternoon, residents were in study hall from 5 to 6, ate supper at 6:30 followed by 45 minutes of free time, in study hall again from 8 to 9 when the younger students retired, followed by older students at 9:30 pm. In addition to

instruction in Ukrainian literature, history and singing, held three times weekly for one hour, the residents had a student circle, a drama club, and an orchestra; they also held debates and discussions and participated in sports. The rectors were always laymen, and they included George Skwarok, who held a BA and MA from the University of Manitoba. Ukrainian Catholic priests, and the bishop, Nykyta Budka, were frequent visitors. Although it survived for 8 years, in the summer of 1925 the Sheptytsky residence also closed its doors, the victim of mounting debts, religious disputes and declining enrolment.



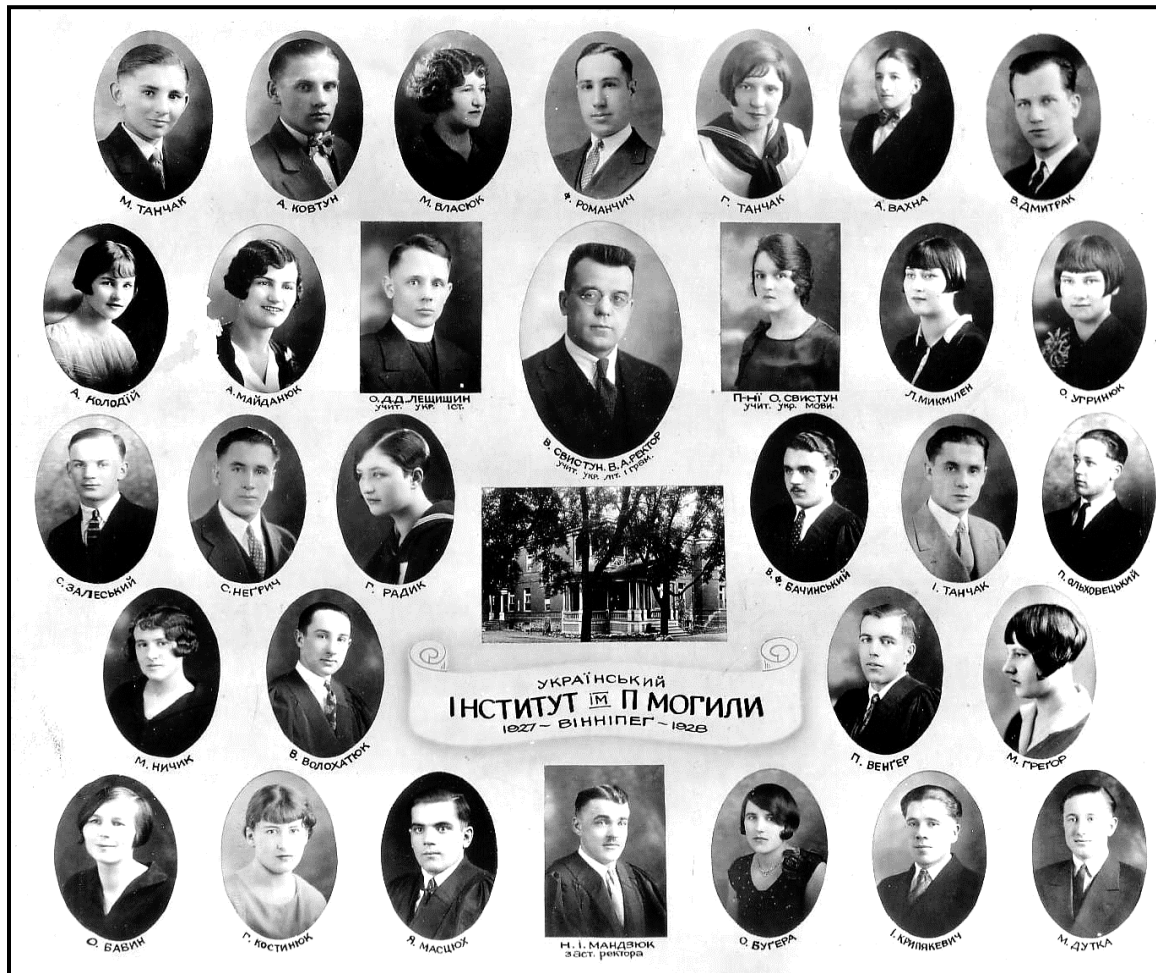
Sheptytsky Residence students with Bishop Budka 1923 (UCEC)



Petro Mohyla Residence (UCEC)

The last attempt to establish a student residence in Winnipeg occurred in 1927 when a branch of the Petro Mohyla Institute, a Saskatoon-based student residence affiliated with the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church, opened its doors in a large home at 71 Smith Street, just a few steps from the Broadway campus of the University of Manitoba. Most of the residents were university and normal school students; the first rector, Wasył Swystun, a law student at the time, had been one of the most important laymen involved in the formation of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church in 1918. In the evenings, Swystun and his wife, a teacher, taught Ukrainian language and literature, while a Ukrainian Greek Orthodox priest taught Ukrainian history. The residents had a student circle, performed at several folk arts festivals in Winnipeg,

and held annual farewell dinners for graduates. Like its predecessors, the Mohyla Institute closed its doors in the summer of 1933 for economic reasons.



Staff and students Petro Mohyla Institute Student Residence Winnipeg 1927-28 (UCEC)

Ukrainian University Graduates

Between 1913 and 1929 at least 45 Ukrainian Canadians earned 47 degrees from the University of Manitoba. Twenty-one Ukrainian Canadians (including 6 with degrees from Manitoba), who had lived and studied in Winnipeg during these years, earned another 25 degrees at six other Canadian and American universities. In total, 60 Ukrainian Canadians (including 7 women), who had lived and studied in Winnipeg, earned 72 university degrees by 1929. The graduates included 28 Bachelors of Arts and 3 Masters of Arts; 1 Bachelor of Sciences and 1 Master of Sciences; 2 Bachelors of Divinity; 14 Bachelors of Laws, 1 Master of Laws and 1 Doctor of Jurisprudence; 6 Doctors of Medicine and 5 Doctors of Dentistry; 4 Pharmacists; 3 Agronomists; and 3 Engineers. In fact, Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba produced more Ukrainian university graduates than any other North American city and university during the years prior to 1929. As a result, the list below includes the names of the first Ukrainian-Canadian male (Zerebko) and female (Sawczak-Dyma) university graduates, school inspector (FT Hawryluk), lawyer and judge (Arsenych), physician (Novak), agronomist (Prodan), dentist (Mihaychuk), pharmacist (Lazechko), and the first Canadian professor of Slavic studies (Andrusyshen). Also on the list are several public figures, including long-serving Winnipeg school trustees (Sawczak-

Dyma, Zaharychuk), several MLAs elected in all three Prairie provinces (Zerebko, D Yakimischak, Goresky), the first Ukrainian-Canadian MP (Luchkowich) and the first Ukrainian Canadian appointed to the Senate of Canada (Wolokhatiuk-Wall).



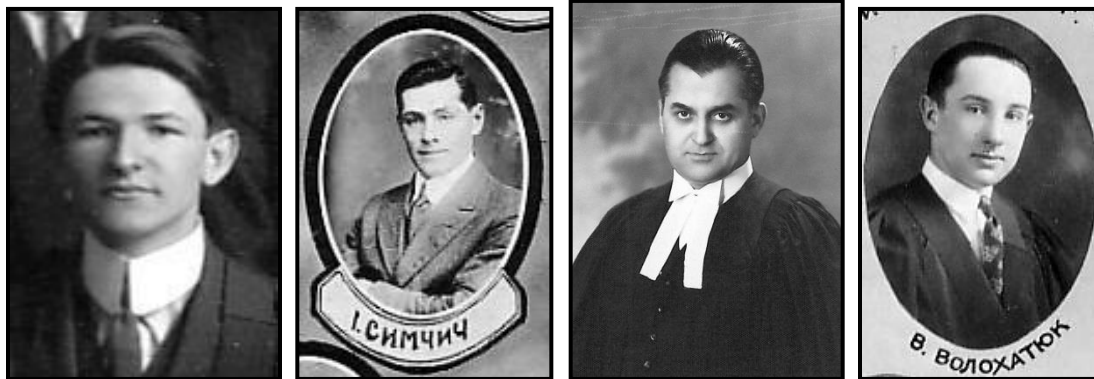
Orest Zerebko, Demetrius (Dmytro) Yakimischak, Jaroslaw Arsenych, Gregory Novak (UCEC)

Table 1. Ukrainian Canadians who studied in Winnipeg and graduated from Canadian and American universities by 1929

NAME (Degree, University, Year)

- Zerebko, Orest (BA, Manitoba, 1913)
- Szkwarok, George (BA, Manitoba, 1915; MA, Manitoba, 1919; LLB, Alberta, 1925)
- Yakimischak, Demetrius (BA, Manitoba, 1916; LLB, Manitoba, 1923)
- Hawryluk, Fred T (BA, Manitoba, 1916; BEd, Saskatchewan, 1932)
- Luchkowich, Michael (BA, Manitoba, 1916)
- Arsenych, Jaroslaw W (LLB, Manitoba, 1917)
- Crath, Paul (BD, Saskatchewan, 1917)
- Dyk, Joseph (LLB, Manitoba, 1918)
- Baleshta, Basil (LLB, Manitoba, 1918)
- Koziar, Peter W (BA, Manitoba, 1918; LLB, Saskatchewan, 1927)
- Mihaychuk, Manoly (BA, Manitoba, 1918; DDS, Toronto, 1922)
- Swystun, Wasyl (BA, Saskatchewan, 1918; LLB, Manitoba, 1931)
- Novak, Gregory (MD, McGill, 1919)
- Stechishin, Michael (LLB, Saskatchewan, 1919)
- Zaharychuk, Andrew (BA, Manitoba, 1920)
- Hnatyshyn, Andrew C (BA, Manitoba, 1920; BSc Eng, Alberta, 1923)
- Prodan, Cornelius S (BSc Agric, Manitoba, 1921)
- Korchynsky, John (BA, Manitoba, 1921)
- Stechishin, Julian (BA, Saskatchewan, 1921; LLB, Saskatchewan, 1931)
- Yatchew, John (BA, Saskatchewan, 1921; MA, Alberta, 1925; LLB, Manitoba, 1926; JD, Michigan, 1929)
- Dyma, Bronislaw (MD, Manitoba, 1922)
- Lazechko, Myroslaw DipPharm, Manitoba, 1922)
- Basarab, John (LLB, Alberta, 1922)
- Yakimishchak, John (MD, McGill, 1923)
- Sawula, Stephen (LLB, Alberta, 1922)
- Sawczak-Dyma, Mary (BA, Manitoba, 1923)
- Symchych, Elias H (DipPharm, Manitoba, 1923)
- Negrych-McIntyre, Marie (DipPharm, Manitoba, 1923)
- Humeniuk, Theodore (LLB, Toronto-Osgoode Hall, 1923)

Skehar, Gregory G (DDS, Northwestern, 1923; MSc(Psych), Northwestern, 1927)
 Perch, John D (BA, Manitoba, 1924; BFA, Yale, 1931)
 Ozero, Samuel V (LLB, Manitoba, 1925)
 Stanko, Jacob (BA, Manitoba, 1925)
 Romaniuk, Nicholas (LLB, Alberta, 1925)
 Zalozetsky, Nicholas (DipPharm, Manitoba, 1926)
 Pidruchney, William N (BSc Agric, Manitoba, 1926)
 Potoski, Peter (MD, Manitoba, 1926)
 Potoski, Michael (MD, Manitoba, 1926)
 Goresky, Isidore (BA, Manitoba, 1926; MA Alberta, 1929; MEd, Alberta, 1945)
 Havryliuk, Aleksander P (BA, Manitoba, 1926)
 Hutzulak, Paul (DDS, Toronto, 1926)
 Kanchier, Paul (BSc, Manitoba, 1926; DDS, Chicago, 1931)
 Malucky, Joseph E (LLB, Chicago Law School, 1926; LLM, Chicago Law School, 1927)
 Reznowski, Lorne W (MD, Manitoba, 1927)
 Bunka, Nicholas (BSc Eng, Manitoba, 1927)
 Genik, Alexander (BSc Eng, Manitoba, 1927)
 Onofreyo-Humen, Mary (BA, Manitoba, 1927)
 Taciuk-Senicki, Leona E (BA, Manitoba, 1927)
 Kovalevitch, John Robert (BD, Manitoba, 1927)
 Wawrykow, Maxim (BA, Manitoba, 1928; BEd, Manitoba)
 Dobush, Peter (BA, Manitoba, 1928; BArch., Manitoba, 1931)
 Elcheshen, Demetrius (BSc Agric, Manitoba, 1928)
 Negrych-McIntyre, Wanda (BA, Manitoba, 1928)
 Andrusyshen, Constantine (BA, Manitoba, 1928; Cert, Sorbonne-Paris, 1930; MA, Manitoba, 1931; PhD [Romance Languages], Toronto, 1940; AM [Slavic Languages], Harvard, 1945)
 Zakus, Paul (DDS, Alberta, 1928)
 Lesik, John (DDS, Alberta, 1928)
 Bilash, Nicholas (BA, Manitoba, 1929)
 Lutack-Jarema, Anna D (BA, Manitoba, 1929; DipSocialWork, Manitoba, 1932)
 Tretiak, Salomea (BA, Manitoba, 1929; MA, Education, Columbia, 1955)
 Wall (Wolokhatiuk), William M (BA, Manitoba, 1929; BEd, Manitoba, 1937; MEd, Manitoba, 1939)



Michael Luchkowich, Elias Symchych, John Yatchew, Wasyl Wolokhatiuk (William Wall) (UCEC)

Who were these first graduates and why were they, unlike the overwhelming majority of Ukrainians in Canada, able to obtain a university education prior to the Great Depression? Virtually all of the graduates, or their parents, had emigrated from Ukrainian lands in the Austro-Hungarian Empire; the only exceptions were two natives of southeastern Ukraine (Crath, Prodan) who emigrated from the Russian Empire to Canada after participating in the failed revolution of 1905. With only one exception (Crath, born in 1882), all of the graduates were born between 1887 and 1911, the average age at the time of first

graduation being almost 29 for those born in the old country and only 22 for those born in Canada and the United States, although many of the former and few of the latter had graduated from professional faculties. Where biographical data on the graduates and their parents is available, it does not support the comforting and self-congratulatory explanations offered by contemporary Anglo-Canadian commentators,



Paul Crath (UCEC)



**Cornelius Prodan
(UCEC)**

who seemed to believe that Ukrainian graduates were the offspring of impoverished and illiterate peasant immigrants who had experienced an ‘educational awakening’ after settling in Canada. Only 21 of the 60 graduates listed above were born in Canada or the United States, and another 8 had emigrated as small children and received all of their education in North America. The remainder, including many of the earliest graduates, had been born in the old country and were the children of literate and relatively affluent and active peasant farmers. In many instances, their parents had established reading clubs, participated in cultural institutions, taken an interest in political life, held positions of authority in village government, and provided their children with at least a few years of education in a secondary school or a classical gymnasium before emigrating. Although, as far as may be determined, only three or four of the Canadian university graduates had matriculated from a gymnasium prior to emigrating (Crath, Swystun, Romaniuk and Sawczak-Dyma), the fragmentary evidence at hand suggests that others who belonged to the earliest cohort of university graduates had completed several years of gymnasium studies (Arsenych, Novak, Skehar, Symchych), a teachers’ college (Symchych) or a technical school (Prodan), and emigrated with the intention of completing their education in Canada. About a dozen enrolled at the Ruthenian Training School shortly after coming to Manitoba, to improve their English and to secure a teaching job with which to finance further studies.

The first American- (Luchkowich) and Canadian-born (Hnatyshyn) graduates completed their degrees in 1916 and 1920 respectively. Many of the Canadian-born and educated graduates were the children of literate and affluent, rural and urban immigrants, who appreciated the value of an education long before they reached Canadian shores and played a prominent role in Ukrainian-Canadian community building. The Genik, Negrych, Yakimischak, Mihaychuk, Dyma, Perch, Stanko and Reznowski, families, to name just a few who produced graduates during these years, fell into this category. They were led by resourceful, sometimes relatively well-educated men, who often spoke some German in addition to Ukrainian and Polish, acquired English in Canada, held government jobs,

helped immigration officers place Ukrainian settlers on homesteads, organized municipal districts, served as municipal reeves and secretary-treasurers, ran successful businesses, and established the first Ukrainian-Canadian cultural-educational institutions and newspapers. In other words, like most Canadian university students during these years, many of the first Canadian-born Ukrainian university graduates came from modest middle class families in which the male breadwinner held a job with more prestige and a higher income than the typical household head.



Virtually all of the graduates were committed to the preservation of the Ukrainian language and sustained the ties that bound them to the Ukrainian community. In most instances, such ties facilitated their studies, and helped them to pursue successful careers after graduation. Constantine Andrusyshen, who would become the first Ukrainian Canadian to earn a PhD in the humanities, was encouraged to continue his studies by the Sisters Servants and Basilian Fathers who taught him at St. Nicholas Ukrainian Catholic school, and by the members of Winnipeg's Ukrainian Reading Association 'Prosvita,' who provided him with an opportunity to hone his skills as a lecturer and helped finance his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris. Ties with the Ukrainian-Canadian community were also sustained by the Ukrainian student residences in which some graduates lived while pursuing their studies, and in particular by membership in student organizations like the Ukrainian Student Circle, which made a point of conducting meetings in Ukrainian and promoting a greater awareness of Ukrainian issues and concerns.

Ukrainian Student Organizations

**Constantine
Andrusyshen UCEC)**

The first known Ukrainian-Canadian students' organization, a 'self-education circle,' which met to discuss books, current events and public issues, was established by Manitoba College students in January 1912 and included Michael Luchkowich and Demetrius Yakimischak among its founders. A Ukrainian students' debating circle in which Luchkowich, Yakimischak, Michael Stechishin and Manoly Mihaychuk played prominent roles was organized in the fall of 1914. However, only in October 1916 did a Ukrainian Student Circle (USC) with a formal set of by-laws, well-defined objectives, an elected executive and regular meetings come into existence. Open to high school and university students, the USC was committed to self-education by means of lectures and debates, cultural work through a choral and dramatic section, fund-raising for a Student Relief Fund (Studentskyi zapomohovyi fond), and the promotion of greater understanding between Ukrainian Canadians and the Canadian public in general. Membership grew steadily surpassing 60 active members by the mid-1920s.

In addition to routine discussions about current and prospective projects, Ukrainian Student Circle meetings usually featured lectures, debates, recitations, singing and instrumental performances. Occasionally the USC staged public concerts which commemorated the achievements of prominent Ukrainian cultural and national figures like Taras Shevchenko, Markiian Shashkevych and Ivan Franko, and promoted Ukrainian national awareness. The March 1917 Queen's Theatre concert organized by the USC in memory of Franko, a radical writer, poet, literary critic and political commentator, involved participation by all five of the city's Ukrainian choral and dramatic societies, and featured vocal solos by Natalia Ferley and Liza Popovich, the wives of the most prominent Ukrainian national- and social-democrats in the city. Some of the concerts, like the April 1922 choral performance at the Presbyterian Robertson Memorial Church at the corner of Burrows Avenue and Mackenzie Street, were also attended by Anglo-Canadians who found the Ukrainian melodies delightful. During the 1920s, USC members went tobogganing in the winter, held at least one or two student dances annually, and in 1927 organized the first graduates' farewell dinner at a downtown restaurant. Non-Ukrainian students were invited to participate in at least some of these functions. A November 1921 dance at the Ukrainian National Home featured a vocal performance of Italian, French and English songs by an Icelandic student identified as Miss Davidson, as well as an English-language comedy routine for non-Ukrainian guests.



Ukrainian Student Circle 1926 (UCEC)

Wartime developments - both on the home front in Canada and in war-ravaged eastern Europe - worked to sustain the students' Ukrainian identity. The abolition of Ukrainian-English bilingual schools in Manitoba in 1916 and the wanton destruction of Ukrainian property and institutions during the January 1919 Great War Veterans' riots in Winnipeg demonstrated that Ukrainian Canadians were still perceived as an alien element by many Canadians. Simultaneously, the anguish of Ukrainians in the homeland and their unsuccessful bid for independence increased the sense of concern and obligation local students felt toward the old country. As a result, during the 1920s the USC staged concerts, plays and skit nights, held dances, and sent out Christmas carollers to raise funds for the Ukrainian Red Cross, which aided western Ukrainian war widows and orphans, and for Ukrainian students who were struggling to obtain an education in Vienna, Prague and several other Central European universities and polytechnic institutes. During the mid-1920s fundraising efforts were mounted on behalf of Ukrainian-language schools and flood victims in eastern Galicia. USC members also sent telegrams concerning the plight of Ukrainian minorities under foreign occupation to British statesmen and Canadian politicians, and they mailed letters, press releases and articles to student newspapers and major dailies to explain and bring the Ukrainian issue to public attention. After 1919, it was not unusual for USC meetings to end with the singing of the Ukrainian national anthem.



Demetrius Elcheshen, John Robert Kovalevitch, Nicholas Zalozetsky, Nicholas Bilash (UCEC)

Lectures and debates were the most common "self-education" activities. Initially, virtually all lectures were delivered by USC members. Some spoke on topics and issues they were studying ("The Inquisition"; "Pragmatism and religion"; "The circulation of blood"; "The structure of the human body"). Others addressed more abstract and philosophical questions ("Human happiness"; "Concord builds, discord destroys"; "The meaning of ideas"; "On co-operations"). Still others focused on the tasks and responsibilities of students ("The meaning of education"; "The influence of the environment on students"; "The World Congress of University Youth") and their role as future leaders of the Ukrainian-Canadian community ("The Future of Ukrainian Students in Canada"; "The objectives, responsibilities and national benefits of the Student Circle"; "The characteristics of Canadian Ukrainians"; "Improving the destiny of Ukrainians"; "On assimilation"). During the 1920s, local Ukrainian professional men, and educated Ukrainian newcomers, were asked to address the Student Circle on topics ranging from local politics to the status of Ukrainian university students under Polish occupation and in Central European émigré centres. Debate topics reflected current concerns more accurately than lectures. They addressed the issue of ethnic intolerance and discrimination in early twentieth century Canada ("Do Ruthenian-Ukrainians benefit from Canadian Liberty?"; "Should Canadian Ukrainians allow themselves to be Anglicized?"; "Should we call ourselves 'Canadian Ukrainians, 'Ukrainian Canadians' or 'Canadians' ?"; "Do Anglo-Canadian university graduates have a better chance of succeeding than Ukrainian-Canadian graduates?") and mirrored the approach of the First World War ("Is war necessary?"; "Is nationalism justified?") and its aftermath ("Does civilization destroy humanity?"; "Should the government in the old country be autocratic?"; "Is the communist order superior to the capitalist order?"). When Ukrainian-Canadian girls and young women started to enrol in high school and university classes and joined the USC after the war many debates focused on the role of women ("Should women have equal rights with men?"; "Should women's wages should be equal to those of men?"; "Should women participate in political life to the same extent as men?"; "Is the cultural evolution of the Ukrainian people more dependent on women than on men?"; "Should women fulfill the same role in public life as men?"). Education ("Does contemporary education improve the lot of humanity?"; "Was classical education superior to modern education?"), popular culture ("Do movie theatres cause more harm than good?"; "Is the sale of beer by the glass more appropriate than by the bottle?"), and international affairs ("Should the United States and Canada unite?"; "Would the Canadian economy grow if Canada opened its borders to foreign manufactured goods?"; "Do great men owe their greatness to circumstances?") were also common topics of debate. The enthusiasm for debating peaked in 1926-7 when a series of debates between representatives of the USC and Saskatoon's 'Kamenari' (Stone-Breakers) Student Circle took place in Winnipeg.

At a time of intense religious and sectarian rivalry within the Ukrainian-Canadian community the USC steadfastly refused to be drawn into the conflict. During the 1920s USC presidents included Catholic (Nicholas Bilash, Demetrius Elcheshen), Orthodox (Nicholas Zalozetsky) and Protestant (John Robert Kovalevitch) adherents. Speakers from all denominations were invited to deliver lectures at USC meetings, and the circle reached out to students at the Ukrainian Catholic Sheptytsky residence and organized several joint social functions. Efforts to maintain the circle's neutrality made it difficult to find and maintain a permanent meeting place and obliged the USC executive to renegotiate rental agreements and to move from one Ukrainian hall to another from year to year. It was a price that USC members were willing to pay, convinced as they were that arguments about religion were a divisive and demoralizing waste of time that only bred hatred among Ukrainian Canadians at a time when more cooperation and greater stability were needed.

When the bottom fell out of the grain market in 1929 and the Great Depression put an end to several decades of growth and optimism, Winnipeg's Ukrainian community already had the nucleus of a Canadian university-educated intelligentsia. Contrary to the self-congratulatory theories of contemporary Anglo-Canadian commentators, who seemed to believe that the graduates were the offspring of impoverished and illiterate peasant immigrants who had experienced an 'educational awakening' after settling in Canada, many of the earliest graduates had been born in the old country and were the children of literate and relatively affluent peasant farmers who had been active participants in old country cultural and political life, and had provided their children with at least a few years of education in a secondary school or a classical gymnasium before emigrating. Likewise, many of the first Canadian-born and educated graduates were the children of literate and relatively affluent, rural and urban immigrants, who had appreciated the value of an education long before they reached Canadian shores and who played a prominent role in Ukrainian-Canadian community-building. It would be some time before those whose 'educational awakening' depended solely on the unilingual Manitoba public school system began to enter and graduate from Canadian universities.

A note on sources

The most important published sources for this paper include J.M. Bumsted, *The University of Manitoba: An Illustrated History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001); Orest T. Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1991); Hryhorii H. Skehar, compiler, *Ukrainski profesionalisty v Amerytsi i v Kanadi 1935* (Winnipeg: Promin, 1935); and Charles H. Young, *The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons Limited, 1931). For statistical data on literacy, language use and education see William Darcovich and Paul Yuzyk, eds., *A Statistical Compendium on the Ukrainians in Canada, 1891-1976* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1980). Unpublished primary sources include Ukrainian-Canadian weekly newspapers, especially *Ukrainskyi holos* (Ukrainian Voice) and *Kanadyiskyi farmer* (Canadian Farmer), and various collections at the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Oseredok), particularly the Demetrius Elcheshen papers and the Ivan Bobersky photo collection. This paper is adapted from my "Ukrainian University Students" part of the *A Tour of Winnipeg's Ukrainian Enclaves, 1890s-1920s* webpage which may be found at http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/ukrainian_canadian_studies/research/winnipegtour.html

Cover photo: Ukrainian Student Circle, Winnipeg, 1927 (UCEC)

Orest T. Martynowych studied history at the University of Manitoba (BA (Hon), MA) and at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Years, 1891-1924* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, University of Alberta, 1991). Currently he is a scholar-in-residence at the Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies, University of Manitoba, researching a project on the history of Winnipeg's Ukrainian Canadians.

Copyright © 2011 Orest T. Martynowych. All rights reserved.

No part of this paper may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

**ONE
UNIVERSITY.
MANY FUTURES**



**UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA**

Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies

**University of Manitoba
c/o Room 203 St. Andrew's College
Winnipeg MB R3T 2N2
Telephone: (204) 474-8906
E-mail: cucs@cc.umanitoba.ca**

Website

http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/departments/ukrainian_canadian_studies/

**The publication of this brochure was supported by
a grant from the SUS Foundation of Canada**

