

The First Wave: Ukrainian Village and St. Nicholas Cathedral (Unpublished)

All four waves of immigration from Ukraine have been part of the growth of the Cathedral.

The first wave began in the 1870s with immigrants from what is now called Ukraine but was then part of Austria. So, they called themselves Rusyns as they were referred to at home. This term also became Ruthenians. As part of Eastern Catholicism, their churches had as part of their legal name Ruthenian.

Ukrainian Catholic communal life officially began on December 31, 1905, when fifty-one immigrants came together at 939 Robey (now Damen Avenue) to establish St. Nicholas the Wonderworker Ruthenian Catholic parish.

In 1906, a Lutheran Church was purchased at Bishop and Superior Streets for \$8,000. A twelve-member board of trustees was elected with the pastor, Fr. Victor Kovaletsy, as chairman, and Dr. Volodymyr Simenovych, a medical doctor, poet, scholar and activist, as secretary. Myron Kuropas, in his pictorial history *Ukrainians of Chicagoland*, calls Simenovych—who had come from Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, where he edited one of the country's first Ukrainian newspapers—"the first ethno-nationally aware Ukrainian immigrant in Chicago."

Protecting their commitment to their eastern-rite, Greek Catholic origins, (and fearing future incorporation by Latin-rite) the board created the Church as a legally independent entity and passed a resolution specifying:

...that all property of said church which may hereafter be acquired be held in the name of its incorporated name but under no conditions shall said church or its priests or pastors be ever under the jurisdiction of bishop or bishops except those of the same faith and rite.

The founders of St. Nicholas also stipulated that in addition to "religious-moral" goals, parishioners were committed "To elevate ourselves through the support of a school, a reading room, political clubs and whatever else is deemed necessary."

Fr. Kovaletsy left St. Nicholas in the spring of 1907. He was succeeded that same year by Fr. Nicholas Strutynsky, a recent arrival from Ukraine, who remained at St. Nicholas until 1921. It was during his – – and his equally energetic wife's – – tenure that Chicago's Ukrainian community grew, prospered, and became irrevocably Ukrainian in ethno-national thinking, feeling and action.

A parish *ridna shkola*, or Ukrainian heritage school, followed in 1907. But in 1913, as more immigrants were arriving, the board—again at Simenovych's urging—bought 20 lots on Rice between Oakley and Leavitt and erected a spectacular church. Built in the Byzantine style of Kiev's Saint Sophia Cathedral, with 13 domes symbolizing Jesus and

the apostles and a capacity of 1,000, the new church held its first liturgy on January 7, 1915—Christmas.

Soon this church became the center of a Ukrainian neighborhood surrounding the 2300 and 2400 blocks of Chicago Avenue, which has since become known as Ukrainian Village. In the aftermath of the fire of 1871, German immigrants developed the area bounded by Division, Damen, Chicago, and Western. After the first wave of Ukrainian and Russian immigration from 1880 to 1910, however, Ukrainians outnumbered other ethnic groups in the neighborhood. By 1930 estimates placed the Chicago Ukrainian population between 25,000 and 30,000, and the majority resided within this small, 160-acre tract. Ukrainian Village began as a predominately working-class neighborhood. Many of the area's first residents were craftsmen employed to build the mansions of their wealthy Wicker Park neighbors.

The story of Ukrainian Village is in large part the story of a 130-year struggle against assimilation. This struggle was brought in by the first wave because in their homeland, the speaking of Ukrainian was banned by both the Russians and Poles. It was perceived as an attempt to do away with not only Ukraine but Ukrainians if not by war at the very least assimilating them into those dominating countries. This was also apparent in the creation of St. Nicholas but also in relation with the Orthodox. In 1903 Czar Nicholas II underwrote construction of the first Ukrainian Village church, Holy Trinity Orthodox Cathedral, at Leavitt and Haddon. The relatively modest stucco cathedral never quite caught on with its Ukrainian neighbors, who balked at worshipping in a Russian church. *Svoboda*, the national Ukrainian-language newspaper, proclaimed, "In the old country they tried to take away our nationality and to make us Poles, Hungarians, and Slovaks. Here in America, they wish to take away our faith. Difficult will be the road of our adversaries. We are equal to the struggle and we are confident that our people will not sell their souls to Judas." Though Ukraine itself didn't gain lasting independence until 1991, Ukrainians in Chicago have kept a tight grip on their ethnic identity and at its heart stood St. Nicholas.

The first wave planted a community and a church in Chicago that was a beacon and why it became the cathedra of the future eparchy.